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ABSTRACT

This booklet provides reference materials for teachers of social studies in the Northwest Territories (Canada). The information was gathered during workshops attended by elders, community representatives, and teachers from the region. A section on the environment describes the geography of the area around Fort McPherson on the McKenzie River and local mammals, birds, fish, and plants important to Native peoples. The section on camp life describes the daily life and seasonal activities of the Loucheux (a Dene people), including their seasonal migrations for fishing, hunting, trapping, and trading; housing; food and food preparation; transportation; clothing and adornment; hunting, trapping, and fishing practices; traditional age and sex roles; traditional values, government, and medicine; and games, holidays, and entertainment. Sections on history discuss trading contacts and conflicts between Dene groups and the Inuit; early White explorers; dealings between Native peoples and fur traders and the Hudson's Bay Company; early missionaries; effects of the Yukon gold rush; river traffic; education from the missionary era to the present; influenza epidemics; treaties; and centennial celebrations in 1970. The section on modern life describes the local education authority, tribal councils, territorial government, services from the federal government, and Fort McPherson businesses and organizations. (SV)

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a community study

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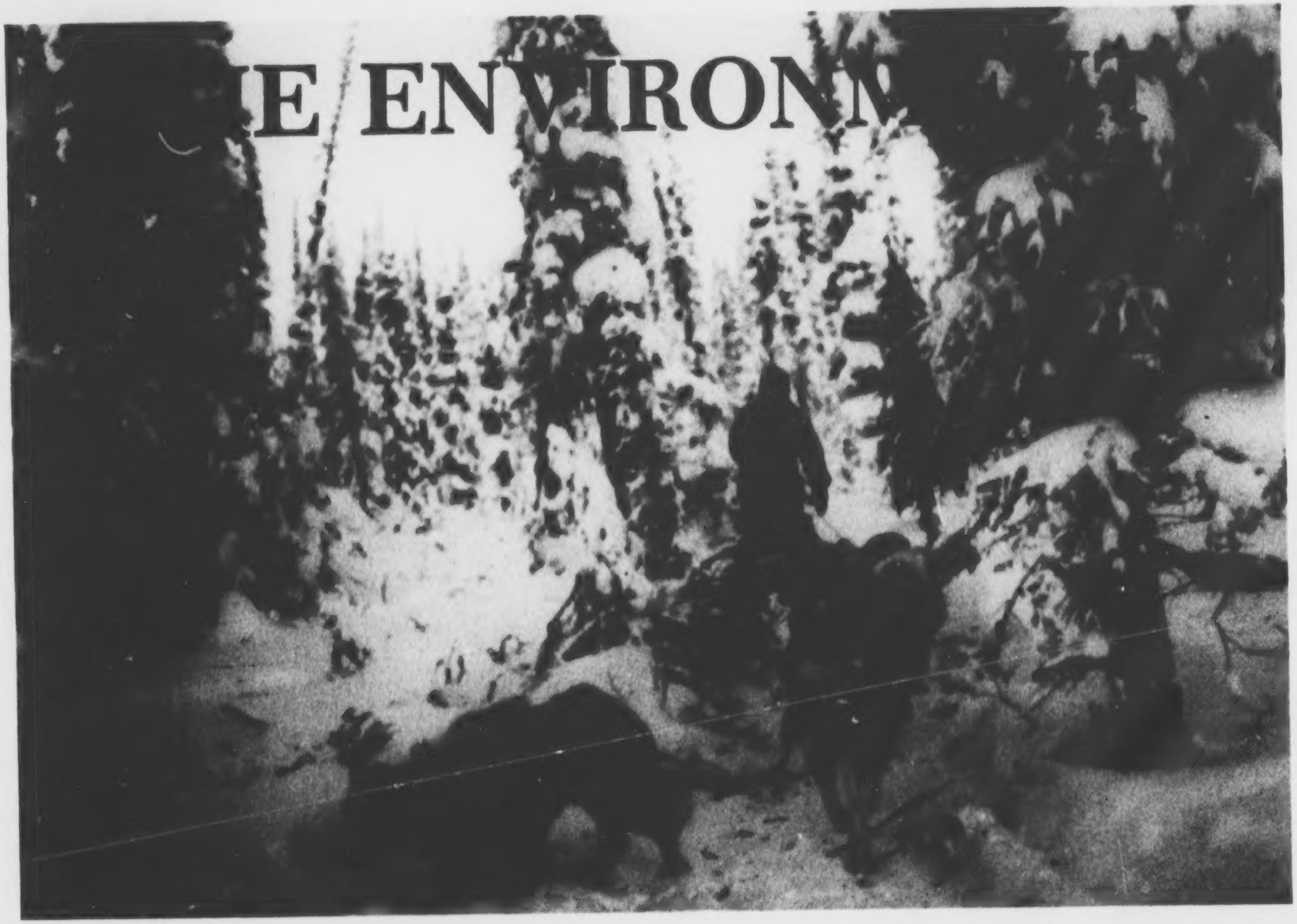

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Fort McPherson is situated on the east bank of the Peel River, about 38 kilometres upstream from the junction of the Peel with the Mackenzie River. The community is built on a flat topped hill of shale which rises some 30 metres higher than the surrounding countryside. The alluvial plain surrounding this hill is interspersed with lakes and swamps and is subject to flooding. Those parts of the alluvial plain which are over 10 metres above the summer level of the Peel River are generally well drained and support spruce, much of which can be used as lumber.

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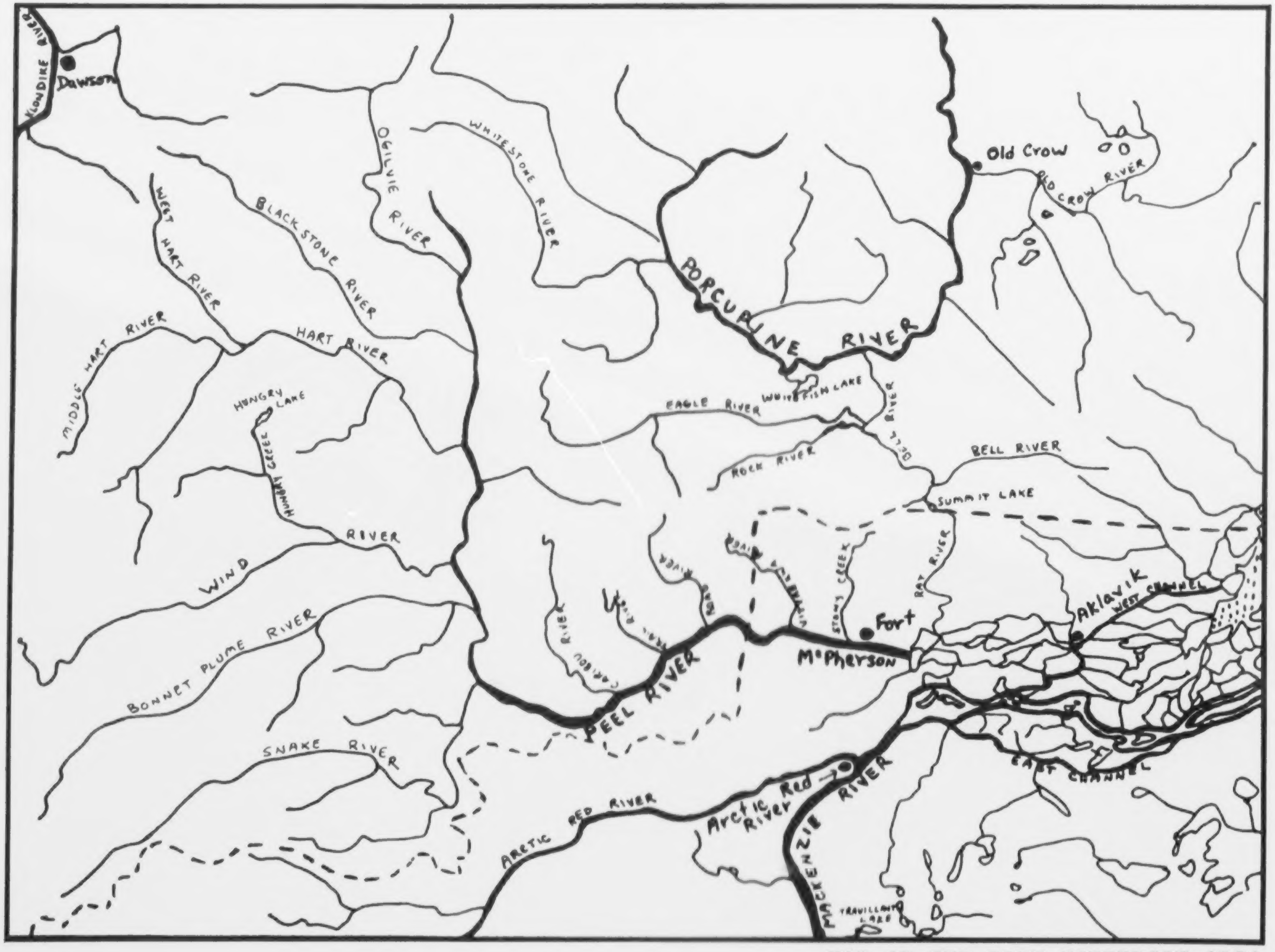
Klondike River
Dawson
West Hart River
Blackstone River
Ogilvie River
Whitestone River
Porcupine River
Old Crow
Old Crow River
Middle Hart River
Hart River
Hungry Lake
Hungry Creek
Eagle River
Whitefish Lake
Bell River
Rock River
Bell River
Summit Lake
Wind River
Bonnet Plume River
Caribou River
Peel River
Stony Creek
Rat River
Fort
McPherson
Aklavik
West Channel
East Channel
Snake River
Arctic Red River
Arctic Red River
Mackenzie River
Travaillant Lake

MAP OF THE FORT MCPHERSON AREA

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MAMMALS

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MAMMALS

American Beavers

Once the trading posts were established in the Mackenzie District, the beaver became important for its fur. The beaver can easily be identified by its protruding teeth, its unique "paddle" tail, and its rich, dense fur which is slightly wavy and chestnut brown in colour. The average length of a beaver is 103-104 cm, and its average weight is 15 to 35 kg.

Beavers eat more than half a kilogram of woody vegetation daily. Its predators are the bear, wolf, fisher, wolverine, lynx and sometimes the otter.

American Marten

The marten is a mink-sized weasel with slender body, short limbs, broad feet and a bushy tail about half the length of its body. It has a broad head tapering to a sharp nose, large ears and large beady eyes.

Its colour may vary from dark brown to almost buff. It is usually dark brown with an almost black tail and legs and a light gray head.

Mice constitute its main source of food. Voles are also an important diet source. Fishers, lynx and owls are reported to prey on them to a limited extent.

American Mink

The mink has a long body, short sturdy legs, a long neck, a flat, pointed face and a bushy tail that makes up half of its body length (about 60 cm). The mink found in the Mackenzie districts are either small and dark in colour or larger and brown in colour.

The most important food for the mink is fish. Insects and birds are also eaten by them. The mink's predators are the owl, the red fox, the wolf and the black bear.

American Porcupine

This large, spiny, sluggish animal is well known by the people of Fort McPherson. It is the second largest rodent in the area, next to the beaver. It measures approximately one metre in length and weighs up to nineteen kilograms. It has a large sturdy body, with a small head, eyes and ears, a blunt nose, a thick tail and short legs. It has four toes on the forefeet and five on the hind feet and strong, long, curved black claws. Its body is covered with stiff quills which may be up to 70 mm long on the middle of the back. These quills are tipped with backward projecting scales, which make withdrawal difficult and cause the tip to gradually work its way inwards. When attacked by other animals porcupines turn their backs and lash out at their enemies with their tails. When the attacker is hit by the porcupine's tail the quills stick into the attacker.

Porcupines eat shrubs, trees, leaves and tree bark. The wolverine and the fisher seem to be the only two animals in the McPherson area that are able to kill the porcupine without becoming pin-cushions themselves.

Porcupine quills have been used for decorative work by the Loucheux for many years.

Arctic Fox

The arctic fox has short legs, a round head, a blunt nose and short, rounded ears. Its tail is approximately half the body length and forms a thick brush. Its summer coat is short and brown in colour with yellow on the flanks and belly. In winter the coat is anywhere from white to pearl gray to blue-black in colour.

Arctic foxes live primarily on lemmings and arctic wolves. They may also eat squirrels, rabbits, birds' eggs and fish. Wolves are their chief predators.

Black Bear

Adult black bears are a little less than a metre high at the shoulder and measure 150 to 180 cm in length. The bear's snout tapers into a broad head. It has rounded ears, a short neck and its back and shoulders form almost a straight line. Its legs are thick and each foot has five toes. The most common colour is black, except for a tan muzzle and white V on the chest. Cinnamon-coloured, honey-coloured or brown bears may also be found.

Black bears eat berries, twigs, leaves, grasses, insects, small mammals and moose and deer calves. The grizzly bear is one of its few natural enemies.

Brown Lemming

Lemmings have large heads, no apparent neck, fat bodies, short, furry feet, and stubby tails. Their eyes are beady, and their small ears are hidden in their long, soft fur. They are gray in colour.

Lemmings eat grasses and the twigs of willows and dwarf birch. The owl, raven, weasel, ermine, arctic fox, red fox, wolf, wolverine and grizzly bear all prey on lemmings.

Coyote

The coyote is a medium-sized dog-like animal, very much like a small collie. It has a slender muzzle, a black nose pad, large pointed ears, long slender legs, small feet and a tail slightly less than half the body length of the animal. Coyotes are generally gray in colour.

Coyotes eat mostly small mammals and to a lesser extent birds, deer, antelope, insects and vegetation. The wolf, black bear and grizzly bear are its natural enemies.

Dall's Sheep

The Dall's sheep is found in the mountains to the west of Fort McPherson. It is slender with a pointed face. Its horns and hooves are light amber in colour, with the remainder of its body being creamy white with occasional dark spots along the spine and tail. The sheep's horns flare out and the tips point away from its face.

Grasses, berries and weeds are eaten by the sheep. Wolves, lynx, wolverines and grizzly bears are its predators.

Ermine

The ermine has a long, slender body, an intense face which is no broader than its neck, and a slender tail which makes up one third of its total body length. Its colour is chocolate brown and creamy in the summer and pure white in the winter, except for the black tip of the tail.

Ermines eat mice, lemmings, shrews, hares, porcupines, squirrels, birds and fish. They are hunted by coyotes, foxes, owls, martens, wolverines, and fishers.

Fisher

The fisher is a close relative of the marten. It is somewhat larger, about the size of a small red fox. Its fur is dark brown or grayish brown mixed with light gray. It eats hares, squirrels, chipmunks and mice. It is one of the few animals that kills porcupines with little danger to itself. Man is the only predator of the fisher.

Grizzly Bear

The grizzly is larger than the black bear. Its snout is longer and rises abruptly into a broad concave face. It has small round ears, and a prominent hump on the shoulders. Its fur is long and varies in colour from creamy yellow to almost black. A grizzly may weigh from 150 to 500 kg.

The Canadian Rocky grizzly hunts moose, mountain sheep and black bears. It also eats small mammals and local vegetation.

House Mouse

The house mouse is a small mouse with a pointed head, large ears, and a long, scaly tail. It is brown to gray in colour.

The mouse eats grains, fruit, vegetable or any stored food or refuse. It is preyed upon by dogs, owls, weasels and foxes.

Lynx

The lynx is a medium-sized cat with short body, long legs, large padded feet and a stubby tail. Its ears are pointed and tipped with lines of black hairs. It has a prominent ruff around its face. It is frosted gray in colour with black stripes on its ears, forehead and ruff.

Lynx generally eat small animals but have been known to kill deer, caribou calves and mountain sheep lambs. Wolves are its main natural predator.

Moose

Moose are hunted in the mountainous regions of Fort McPherson. They are hunted for their meat and hides.
The moose is the largest member of the deer family. Its name is derived from the Algonkian name which means "eater of twigs". They eat mostly leaves and twigs from trees. Grizzly, black bears and wolves prey on weaker moose.

Muskrat

The muskrat is an important animal to the Peel River people, both for its meat and its hide.

An average muskrat measures 50 cm in length and weighs about 1500 kg. It has a short, stocky body, small eyes, and short ears which are hidden in its fur. It has short legs; small delicate front ones for grasping things, and large hind ones with five toes. Its coat is a glossy mahogany brown, darkest on the head and rump with flanks that are chestnut to hazel in colour. Besides this normal colouring, black, white, gray and fawn coloured muskrats may be found in the McPherson area.

Muskrats eat cattails, bullrushes, reeds and other pond plants. They may also eat turtles and frogs. The mink is its most serious predator. Foxes, wolves and owls may also kill and eat muskrats.

Muskrats live in water that is deep enough not to freeze to the bottom in the winter and shallow enough to have submerged vegetation.

Northern Red-Backed Vole

This vole is small, with rounded, well-furred ears which extend well beyond its fur. It has a short tail. Its hind feet have five toes and its forefeet have four. In summer a bright stripe runs from its forehead to its tail. In winter this stripe becomes cinnamon-coloured.

The vole eats buds, twigs, shrubs, and berries. It does not eat mosses or lichens. It is eaten by the fur bearing carnivores in this area.

The singing vole is also common in this area. It is gray to grayish brown in color. It is characterized by its high-pitched singing.

Also found in the McPherson area are the meadow and long-tailed vole.

Red Fox

Red foxes may be red, silver or grayish brown in colour. It resembles a slender dog with a sharp pointed face and ears.
Red foxes will eat whatever is available to them. Small mammals make up most of their diet. Coyotes prey upon the red fox. This fox seems to be too agile for the more cumbersome wolves to prey upon.

River Otter

The otter is long and streamlined with a rounded nose pad, long tapered tail, small eyes and ears, muscular neck scarcely narrower than its head, powerful short legs and webbed toes. Otters are almost black in the summer. In winter they turn to a dark auburn colour, except for a small spot under the chin which is silver gray.

Otters obtain most of their food from the water, eating mostly fish and bugs.

Shrews

The shrew is amongst the smallest living mammals. It has a long pointed snout, short velvety fur, small black eyes, fairly prominent ears and short legs. It is approximately 10 cm long. The most common in this area is the Arctic Shrew. Its winter coat is glossy black with brown flanks and gray belly. In summer it has a chocolate brown back with gray-brown flanks and belly.

Snowshoe Hare

This hare is medium sized, weighing about 1800 g, with broad hind feet and large ears. In summer it is brown or grayish brown with white feet. In winter it turns white. Hares eat grasses, bugs, twigs, bark, leaves and berries. Its predators are owls, lynx, wolves, and mink.

These animals were trapped by the Loucheux. Their pelts were cut into strips, then knitted to make clothing for children and women.

Wolf

The wolf is similar in appearance to a husky sled dog, but it is lankier with longer legs, larger feet and a narrower chest. It has a long, bushy, black-tipped tail. The wolves range in colour from snow white to dark black.

Wolves are primarily hunters of big game, including moose, caribou, and mountain sheep. Small game, such as hares, beavers, muskrats and mice are also important to their diet.

Wolverine

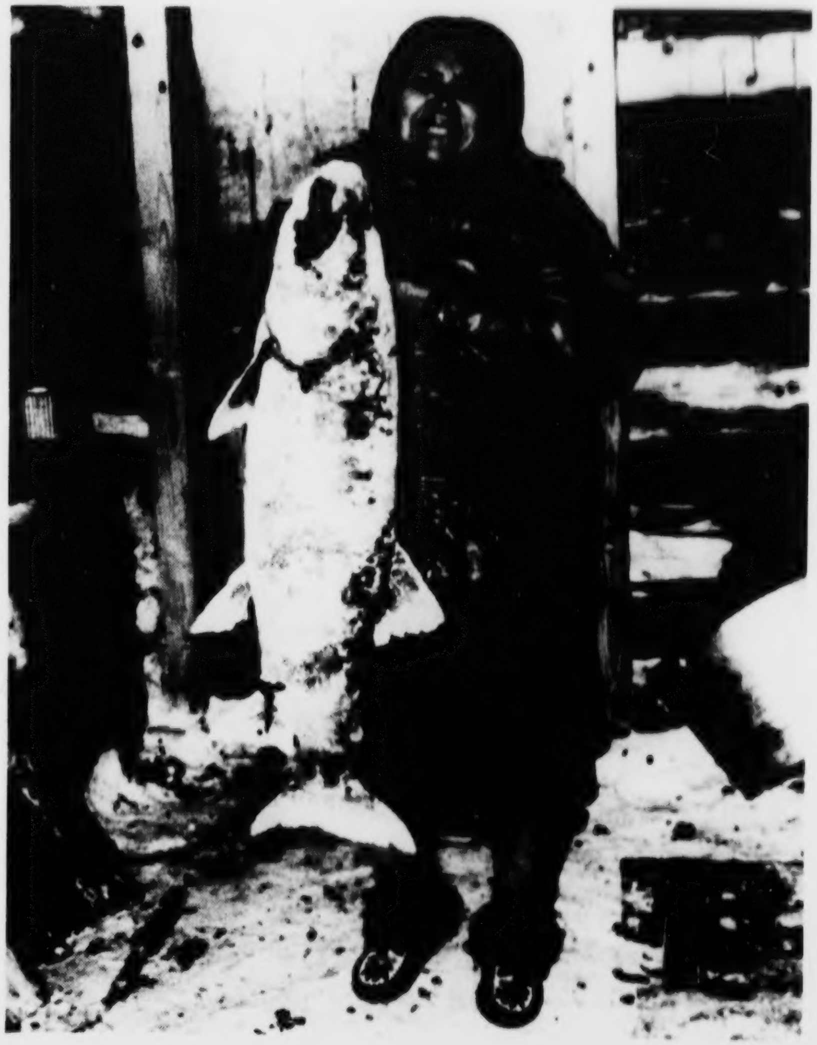
The wolverine is about the size of a bear cub. It has a short, bushy tail, relatively long legs, large paws with five claws on each foot, broad head, short-round ears, and beady black eyes.

The wolverine is a scavenger which eats almost anything that is available.

Woodland Caribou

The caribou is brown and white and has antlers. Both males and females lose their antlers in the spring. At one time, the presence or absence of woodland caribou herds meant life or death to the Peel River people. Without them the people would starve. The woodland caribou range through the forest and alpine tundra of the Mackenzie Mountains. Every spring and fall caribou herds move across the land in a great migration to the calving grounds and then back to the northern forest. The herds cover distances of 700 km and may be spread out over 10,000 km^2.

Caribou eat up to 4 kg of lichens, grasses, twigs and leaves per day. The wolf is its most serious predator. Occasionally a grizzly, lynx or wolverine will also kill and eat a caribou.



BIRDS FISH AND PLANTS

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BIRDS

Ducks

Several species of ducks are found in the McPherson area.

Geese

Geese are large waterfowl. They are bigger, heavier bodied and have longer necks than ducks. Geese are noisy when flying and usually fly in a line or V formation. Male and female have the same colouring. Geese often graze on land, eating mainly grasses, seeds and water plants.

Species found in the McPherson area are: Canada Goose, Brant Goose, White-fronted Goose, Snow Goose and Ross' Goose.

Ptarmigan

The ptarmigan is a member of the grouse family. It lives on the ground, making its nest there. The ptarmigan has very effective camouflage colouring. In summer it is a mixture of grays, browns and black, and in winter it is white. The most common species are the Willow Ptarmigan and the smaller Rock Ptarmigan.

Raven

The raven is a scavenger found throughout the Mackenzie district. It is black in colour and eats almost anything it can find.

Swans

Swans are big, all-white, swimming birds. They have longer necks and are bigger than geese. Like some geese, they migrate in line or V formations. They forage for water plants and seeds by immersing their heads and necks under water. Sometimes while foraging under water the swan's tail end tips up, which is a very comical sight.

Snowy Owl

The Snowy Owl is a large, bulky bird. The male is almost pure white, while the female's feathers are tipped and barred with dark brown. The smooth, round head has no ear-like tuft, like other owls. The owl's eyes are directed forward and do not move in their sockets. To look at a moving object an owl can swivel its head 270 degrees.

Unlike other owls, the Snowy Owl is active in the daytime. This is a reasonable adaptation since daylight is continuous during its summer nesting season.

The Snowy Owl eats arctic hare, ptarmigan, mice, fish, small birds and lemmings. It eats its prey whole. Its strong stomach fluids dissolve the flesh and the bones. Fur and teeth are compacted into neat pellets which are thrown up by the bird.

Snowy Owls do not regularly migrate to southern Canada but every four or five years they migrate somewhat further south than normal. These migrations match declines in in the lemming population.

In a season with little food, often no eggs at all are laid. If there are eggs laid, there will generally be no more than four. In a good season up to ten eggs may be laid. Single eggs are laid on alternate days. A newborn's plumage is white, then dark gray and finally black after ten days. The young fly at eight weeks, and their dark brown down is replaced by white flight feathers at this time.

FISH

Arctic Char

Arctic char are occasionally found in this area. The char is very streamlined, with dark green back shading, silvery sides and belly, and pinkish spots on the sides. They are known to fishermen as spectacular fighters.

Herring

The herring is a soft-finned, narrow-bodied fish which was very important to the Peel River people. It was caught in the summer and stored for use in the winter.

Inconnu

The inconnu is a member of the whitefish family. It somewhat resembles a large herring, with dark back, silvery sides and large scales. In the Mackenzie Delta, inconnu average 4 to 10 kg. Some commercial fishermen have reported catching inconnu weighing over 30 kg.

Trout

The Lake Trout is found through the Mackenzie, Thelon, Back and Coppermine drainage systems.

Whitefish

The whitefish is somewhat egg-shaped. It has two flags between the openings of each nostril, the snout overhangs the lower jaw, and its silver sides may shade to dark or olive brown. This fish forms an important part of the diet of the Loucheux.

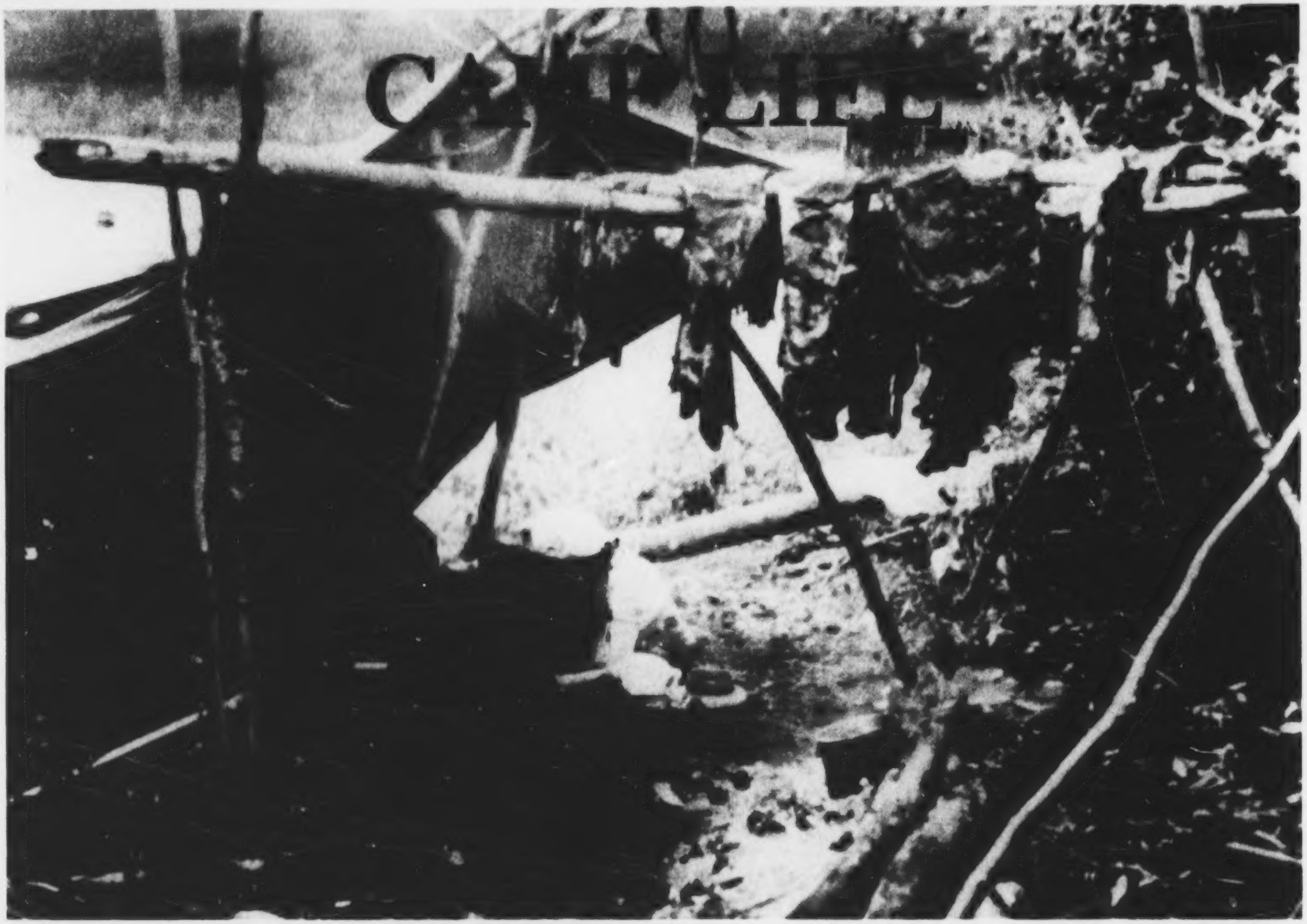
Northern Pike or Jackfish and Grayling are also found in the McPherson area. Salmon are also sometimes caught.

PLANTS

The principal species of trees in this area are spruce, pine, alder, willow and birch, with spruce overwhelmingly predominant.

Birch and willow were both important to the Loucheux for making things such as canoes, fish nets, etc.

CAMP LIFE



MIGRATIONS

In days past, the Loucheux people of Fort McPherson followed a pattern of seasonal migration. Although the principal activities for each season were clearly defined, individual deviations from these practices did occur. Fresh meat, and a change of diet were always welcome, so people occasionally hunted, fished, or snared small game throughout the year. Intermittent visits to McPherson or Dawson were also made for various reasons by individuals or small groups.

Most of the following information on seasonal activities deals with the period around 1920, though references are made to both earlier and later times.

Mid-Summer/Fall Fishing

The departure of the annual steamboat, which usually occurred in mid-July, marked the time for the people to move to their summer fishing camps. Birch bark canoes were used for the journey to the fishing areas.

From McPherson, some people headed west following the Rat, Stony and Vittrekwa Rivers. From here, small groups moved out along the Rock, Eagle, Porcupine, and Bell Rivers. These people were known as the people of the Delta.

A second group, known as the Mountain People, were led south, up the Peel River, by their Chief. At the head of the Peel, they separated, with groups following the Snare, Bonnet Plume, Wind, Hart, and Blackstone Rivers.

Once a group reached its fishing camp, the people remained fairly stationary, catching and preserving as much fish as possible. In September, while the moose and caribou were still fat and their skins were in prime condition for making clothing, the people made hunting trips into the mountains. When the inconnu runs began in the mountain streams, people returned to their fish camps and continued building up stores of fish for winter use. The fishing season came to an end when the ice was thick on the rivers to make travel by dog team possible.

In later years, sometimes cash income would be obtained by selling the surplus of fish to the Bay.

Winter - Hunting

In late October, or early November, the people left their fishing camps and moved high into the Richardson Mountains between Dawson and McPherson, to hunt moose and caribou.

They moved camp frequently during this season. Once they located a herd of caribou or some moose, they would stop and make camp. The men would begin to hunt, harvesting as many of the animals as possible. They would remain in this camp long enough for the women to prepare the meat and skins. This usually took a couple of weeks. While the women worked with the meat, the men set traps. As soon as the work was completed, the camp moved. A new herd was located, and the pattern was repeated over and over.

With the lengthening days and warmer temperatures of late winter, people began moving towards Fort McPherson, hunting along the way.

With the change in life-style from subsistence hunting/gathering to a hunting/trapping economy and the legislation of a trapping season, there was a change in the seasonal round of activities. Most trapping now is done prior to Christmas, and hunting takes place after the New Year.

Spring-Ratting

At the first sign of spring, the Loucheux began their return trip to McPherson. They attempted to make their way out of the mountains before breakup. If spring came early, it was sometimes necessary to abandon the sleds, and proceed with pack dogs.

The people of the Delta arrived in McPherson in the early spring, then went down to the Delta for the spring rat hunt. They returned to McPherson at the end of June, shortly after breakup.

Meanwhile, the Peel River, or Mountain People, gathered in groups along the various rivers close to the head of the Peel River. Here they built the large moose skin boats needed to finish their journey. Beaver were also trapped at this time. As soon as the river was relatively free of ice, they travelled on to McPherson arriving at about the same time as the other groups arrived from the Delta.

In later years, as the price of muskrat pelts rose considerably, all the people of McPherson became involved in spring ratting.

Summer - Trading

The primary reason for the annual visit to Fort McPherson was to trade skins for supplies from the Bay. The visit coincided with the First of July festivities, the annual arrival of the steamboat, and the Bishop's visit. As this was the only time of year when all the people were together, much socializing took place. With the departure of the steamboat, the annual cycle began again.

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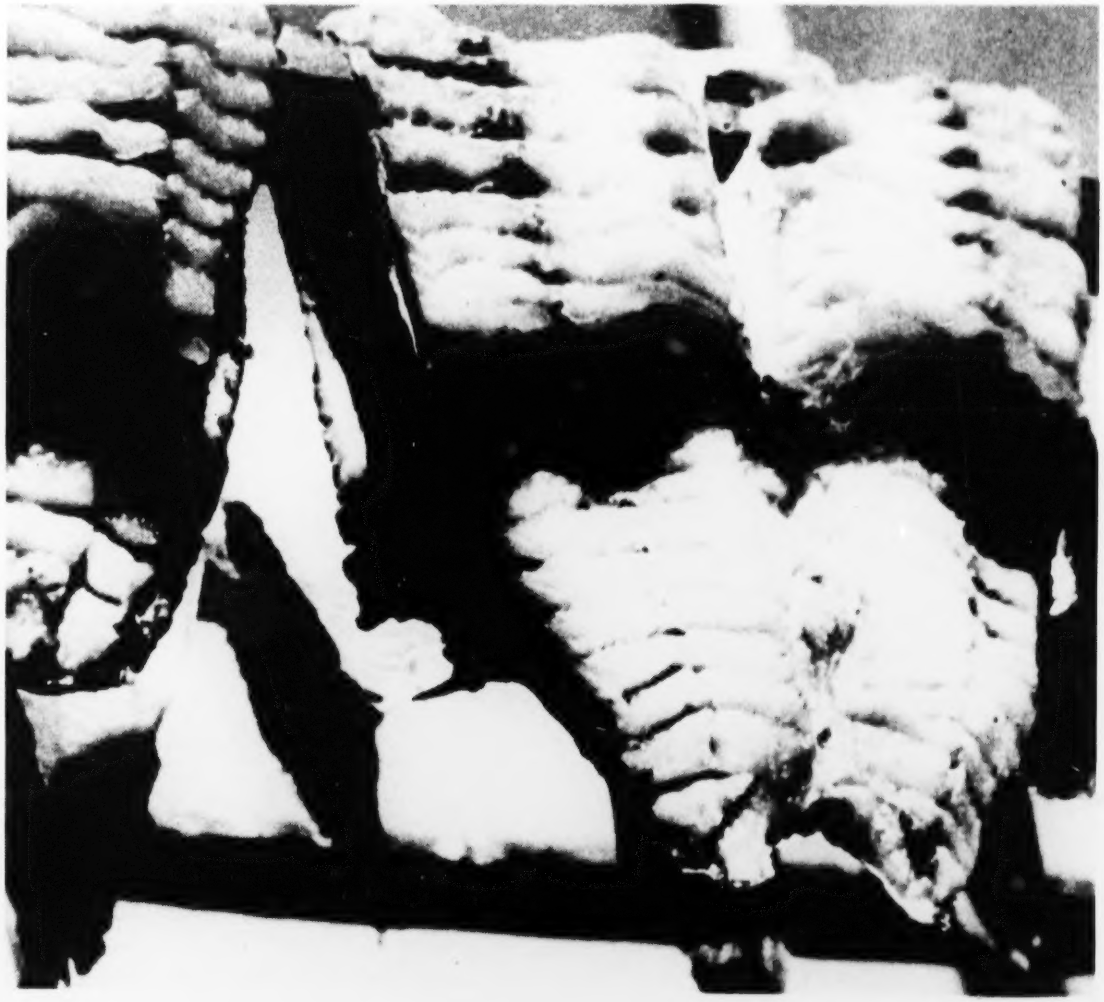


HOMES AND FOOD

HOMES

People lived in tents made of spruce bark, moose hides or caribou skins placed over a frame of willow poles.

When families were travelling, a new structure had to be built every night. Camps were always set up in areas where plenty of dry wood was available. The number of families living in a camp depended on the abundance of fish or game in the area.

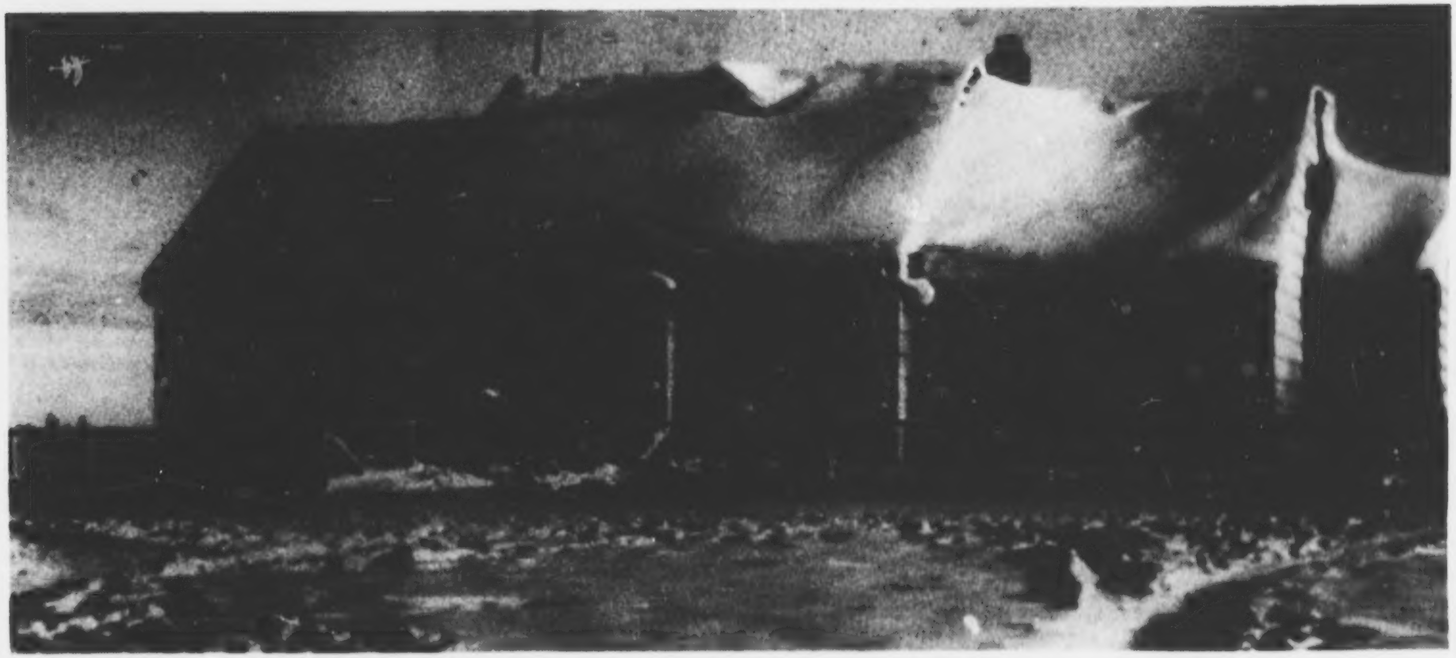
The structure of the tents varied from season to season. In the summer, a framework of 8 to 10 willow poles was erected, then covered with either layered spruce bark or skins. The floor was covered with layers of brush, and a mound of mud was placed in the center, on which the fire was built. Building the fire on a mound, rather than in a pit, prevented the tent from filling up with smoke. The smoke escaped through a hole in the tent, directly above the fire. Lamps burning fish or bear oil were used. Goods were stored on a stage outside the tent.

In the fall, the layers of spruce bark were removed from bark homes. The pieces of bark were soaked, then coated on the outside with mud. They were then placed back on the frames. This made the houses warmer.

In the winter, suitable locations for tents were marked. The snow in an area the size of the planned dwelling was first stamped down with snowshoes, then removed with a wooden shovel. After the floor was laid, the poles were set and covered as in summer. For added insulation, the walls of the dwellings were often banked with snow.

Approximately 20 caribou skins were required to cover one skin tent. In summer, the skins were tanned on both sides, which meant the tent was soft even after a rain. In the winter, one side of the skins were tanned, but the hair was left on the other side. Winter tents were erected with the hair on the inside, making them warmer. Sometimes a red paint, or dye, made from stone was applied to the seams of skin tents for decoration.

In later years, some people built log cabins for their homes. These were different from the log homes in McPherson today. Each log cabin had an open fireplace in the center, and was covered on the outside with sod.



FOOD

Caribou, moose and fish formed the staple diet of the people in this area, although sheep were also hunted in the mountains. Ducks, geese, ptarmigan and rabbits were also eaten from time to time. Eggs, roots, wild onions and berries were gathered in season.

Fresh caribou or moose meat could be roasted or boiled. To roast a caribou, the head, front legs and ribs were hung over an open fire. Fat from the animal was then placed over the meat. Meat was boiled in birch bark baskets. A basket was placed in a hole, then filled with snow. A stone, kept in the fire until it became red hot, was then placed into the basket. The meat was added. The snow soon melted, then began to boil, cooking the meat and making a broth. The broth was later drunk.

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Most meat that was not consumed immediately was dried to preserve it. Periodically, the meat was covered with a caribou skin, then stepped on to flatten it. The drying process took two or three days. Some of the dry meat was then made into pemmican. To do this, the dry meat was pounded into a powder, then small pieces of caribou fat and marrow were added to it. Berries were often added to this mixture. The mixture was then packed into caribou skin bags. It was tasty, light to transport and lasted a long time.

The bones, marrow, and extra fat from the animals were boiled to produce a clean, pure white grease. The grease was put into a clean container, traditionally the stomach of a caribou, and kept frozen. Blood was used to make soup. The guts were dried out and eaten.

Children were not allowed to eat young calves, the insides of animals, or too much fat. Also, it was believed that if a child ate the head of an animal, he would suffer from headaches when he grew up.

Most of the fish caught in late summer and early fall were dried. The fish were first filleted, then the fillets were scored and hung to dry. Dried fish was packed in bales. Fish grease (or oil) was obtained by boiling fish guts. The grease was mixed with fish roe and put away in bags for the winter. In August, some fish were cooked, dried, and pounded into powder that was mixed with oil and cranberries, then packed in birch bark containers for winter use. In the fall, some fish were smoked.

When the temperatures dropped to below freezing, fish were preserved by freezing.

When the women had time in the fish camps, they picked berries. Cranberries, blueberries, mooseberries and red currants were abundant. Wild onions were also picked in the area. Roots, described as "the kind the mice hide in", were cooked and eaten. Whenever these roots were taken, something else was left in their place for the mice.

In spring, when the sap was rising, people peeled back the bark of willows and drank the sap. Muskeg tea and the water in which meat or fish had been boiled were also drunk.

Flour, sugar and tea were obtained from the store in Dawson or the Hudson's Bay store in McPherson.

TRANSPORTATION

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TRANSPORTATION

During the winter, most travel was done with dog teams and snowshoes. After breakup, most travellers followed the waterways in birch bark canoes, moose skin boats, and later, scows. When it was necessary to go overland, the dogs were used for packing, while the people travelled on foot. Women helped to carry supplies and often had to carry babies and young children.

Snowshoes

The men made snowshoe frames of split birch. Women laced them with babiche which is raw caribou hide specially cut into long strips and worked with while it is wet.

Dog Teams

Dog teams were very important to the Loucheux people. Nearly everyone had a team. Usually two to five dogs made up a team. Sometimes, one person handled two teams at once.

Since the dogs were valued by the Loucheux, they were well cared for. Large teams were not kept, since it would be too difficult to feed a large team properly. Teams were neither hurried nor overworked.

Each team pulled a sled. The birch frame of the sled was laced together with babiche. Sometimes the runners were covered with the skin from caribou shins. These were slippery, and made the sled move along easily.

People who did not have sleds sometimes used a caribou skin to pull their possessions on.

Pack Dogs

When the people had to travel overland after breakup, they went on foot, using their dogs for packing. Each dog could carry about 30 kg, in two packs.

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Birch Bark Canoes

The men built birch frames for the canoes. The women then covered the frames with birch bark, sewing the pieces together with spruce roots. The seams were sealed with resin from spruce trees.

These canoes were used by the Loucheux when they travelled up the rivers from Fort McPherson to their fishing camps. They were also used occasionally for hunting trips.

Moose Skin Boats

As spring approached, the Mountain people moved down towards the Peel River. Close to the head of the Peel, the groups set up their camps. Here the men trapped beaver, while the women finished tanning the winter's skins. This was also where the moose skin boats were built for the trip back to McPherson.

The moose skin boats were built before the breakup of the Peel. The men built a frame from birch, and strapped it together with babiche. They made a large birch paddle, or rudder, as well. The women fitted the moose skins over the frame and sewed them together with babiche. It took from eight to 14 skins to cover one boat. The skins were then coated with caribou fat, which waterproofed the boat. The seams were covered with a glue-like substance made by combining spruce gum and caribou fat. It took a week and a half to two weeks to build the boats.

By the time the ice went out of the river, the boats were ready. The Chief gave instructions on how to guide the boats down the canyon. Before the journey began, the Chief divided the remaining bullets evenly among the people. The boats were then loaded, with the toboggans first. Tents were loaded on next, then other ings. The meat was packed into the back of the boat. The dogs were then tied in, and finally the people came on board. The captain had a seat in the back of the boat. It was his job to steer, using a large paddle or rudder. Another man stood at the head of the boat as a lookout for rocks and rapids.

Christopher Collin remembers one year when 50 families travelled down the Peel River in 12 moose skin boats. Four of these boats were built near the mouth of the Wind River. At the head of the Peel River, these four boats were met by two more that had been built on Hungry Creek, near Hungry Lake. They travelled together down the

Peel to the mouth of the Snake River, where they met the remaining six boats. All 12 boats overnighted at this spot. The last launching of a moosehide boat by Loucheux people was in 1923.

The passage through Swift Canyon, near the head of the Peel, was dangerous as the waters were high at that time of year. In the worst places, the women, children and dogs walked along the shoreline while the men guided the boats through. Panic or excitement would have been disastrous in the dangerous waters. At the end of the canyon, a volley of shots was fired to celebrate safe passage.

At Eight Mile Creek, an advance party of two strong boys paddling a canoe was sent ahead to McPherson. The boys picked up a few minor supplies, including tobacco, and then returned to the moose skin boats. The people in McPherson now knew that the boats would come soon. A few days later, as the boats reached the island (or the last bend in the river), the Mountain People announced their arrival by firing the last of their shells into the air. The people in McPherson responded by firing their welcome shots from the shore.

In town, all the tents were pitched around the Bay store. This was the one time of the year that all the people were together. There were feasts and games, and gifts were exchanged. Marriages were often arranged at this time. A few days later, when the steamboat arrived with new supplies for the Bay, trading was completed and religious services were held by the travelling bishop.

The steamboat usually stayed for two days. Festivities continued during this time. When the steamboat left, the people too left McPherson. The time had come to return to the summer fishing camps.

CLOTHING AND ADORNMENT

CLOTHING AND ADORNMENT

Clothing was made from rabbit, moose or caribou skin. After an animal was skinned, the hide was scraped, washed and stretched to dry. Later it would again be scraped, then soaked, and scraped again, and then dried. This process removed the hair and cleaned the skin. Next, women would scrape the hide with a large bone scraper to make it soft and supple. Finally, the hide would be smoked, and then used to make moccasins, mukluks, mitts, parkas, or any other clothing that was required.

Rabbit skins were cut into long narrow strips. Each pelt made a strip about a metre and a half long. These were dried outside, in the wind, then twisted and knitted into clothing.

Everyday clothes were plain and serviceable. Skins used for making these clothes were tanned on one side and rough on the other. This made them more durable. They were like today's bluejeans.

Fancy clothes were kept for special occasions. The skins used for making these clothes were very soft and often white, carefully tanned on both sides. They were decorated with ivory beads, moose hair tufting, or porcupine quills. The quills were dyed, using natural dyes from rocks, trees or berries. They were then sewn onto the garments in traditional designs.

In later years, the porcupine quills and moose hair tufting were largely replaced by beads or embroidery thread purchased from the Bay. Decorative clothing included buckskin jackets, moccasins, and belts.

Summer clothing was sewn from thin caribou skins. Men and children wore overalls sewn from this skin. Winter mukluks were made from moose or caribou which was tanned on one side, but with the hair left on the other side. The hair left on the hide was trimmed short. The garments were sewn with the fur on the inside, for added warmth.

Rabbit skin clothing was generally for children. Newborn babies were carried in rabbit skin bags packed with carefully cleaned moss which served as a diaper. Rabbit skin clothing was not, however, exclusively for young children. Rabbit skin caps, like bonnets, were common. Young women sometimes wore dresses of rabbit skins. Men wore rabbit skin parkas, and sometimes rabbit skin pants, when hunting in very cold weather. Rabbit skin clothing was worn by anyone when there was a shortage of caribou and moose hides. Clothing made from rabbit skin was very warm.

Men had special leggings which they wore when hunting. These were something like children's sleepers, with the boots attached to the legging. Women wore dresses that reached between the knee and the ankle.

Young girls wore dyed feathers in their hair. They made makeup by crushing special types of earth into a fine powder. Ashes and dyes were also worn as makeup. Before applying the makeup a very fine type of marrow from the toe bones of the caribou would be rubbed on the face. A special grease was also used as a cream to keep the skin of the hands and face soft and young looking.

HUNTING TRAPPING AND FISHING

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HUNTING

Long ago, most hunting in the mountains was done with bows and arrows. Some hunting was done in September to take advantage of the prime condition of both the meat and the pelts of the animals. The true hunting season, however, began in November after freeze-up, and lasted until the first signs of spring appeared near the beginning of May. Caribou and moose were the main animals hunted, and, to a lesser degree, sheep. Some bear, rabbits, fish, beaver, duck, geese and ptarmigan were also shot by the Loucheux.

This was a season when camps were moved often. The men would walk ahead, looking for game. The women and children followed at a safe distance, leading the dogs so that they would not make any noise to scare off any game which the men might encounter. Camps were set up where hunting was good, and were moved when the meat and skins from the hunt had been attended to. As many as 10 families might live together in a hunting camp. At most, a hunting camp was occupied for a couple of weeks. When the people were moving to a new location, new dwellings had to be set up every night.

The Loucheux knew the approximate locations of caribou herds at various times of the season. Camps were set up just far enough away from the herd so as not to distress the animals, but within easy reach by the hunters. Only when the hunt was finished were the dogs brought from camp to haul the meat back. If there were not enough sleds, sometimes a caribou skin or leg was used for hauling meat back to camp.

At the campsite, some of the meat was roasted over an open fire. The head, legs and ribs of a caribou were favoured parts. Roast caribou calf was considered a delicacy.

The rest of the meat needed to be preserved. Now the women began their work of drying the remaining meat and preparing the skins. The camp usually stayed in one place for a week or two while the women did their work with the meat and skins. The men usually set dead fall traps during this time.

When the women had completed their work, they wrapped the dried meat in clean caribou skins, or sometimes they packed it in specially made bags of caribou skin. The meat was piled on the sleds, along with other possessions. The Loucheux were now ready to move on to a new herd, where they would set up their next hunting camp. This pattern was repeated many times throughout the winter.

A less common practice was to snare caribou. To do this, first a caribou enclosure was built. This was similar to the fish traps, and was made by driving poles into the ground. The caribou were chased into the enclosure, where they could be snared easily. The snares were made of ropes of braided caribou skin, tied to long poles.

After a successful moose hunt, there was always a time of feasting. Two or more hunters tracked the animal. One hunter then circled around, and drove the moose back towards the hunters who were lying in wait. The man who successfully shot the moose carried one piece of meat back to the camp. This piece of meat was shared by everyone.

The next day, either the entire camp was moved to the place where the moose was shot, or everyone went out and helped to bring the meat back to camp.

As in the case of caribou hunting, the camp again remained stationary while the women dried the meat and prepared the skin. The men also took advantage of this time to set dead fall traps. The camp was moved as soon as the work was completed.

Sheep were less important to the Loucheux than either caribou or moose, but they were a valuable supplement to the people's diet. They were hunted mainly by the Mountain People, who remember times when up to 1,000 sheep were seen at once. The most common practice for hunting sheep was to creep up to the sleeping animals. The hunters would then pack the animals back to camp on their backs. A strong man could pack 3 1/2 sheep at one time. The sheep were usually roasted.

Christopher Collins estimated that, in his lifetime, he had shot 50 sheep, 108 moose, and "lots of caribou". He said he remembered getting as many as 30 caribou at one time.

Grizzly bears were considered very dangerous. If a grizzly was found in an area close to a Loucheux camp, everyone, including the women, joined in a group effort to drive the bear out of its den and kill it.

In the spring, when the Mountain People returned to the head of the Peel, they concentrated on beavers. Beavers were mainly trapped, but some were shot as well. The meat was eaten, and the pelts were either used for trim, or kept for trade with the Bay. To a lesser extent, ducks and geese were also hunted at this time. A common practice was to chase moulting geese, which could not fly, catch them, and wring their necks.

While the bow and arrow were the traditional tools of hunting, they were replaced by guns many years ago. When guns were first introduced, people often missed their game. There was a time when the Chief ordered his people to put the guns away and return to bows and arrows, but this did not last long. People began to use some of their dry meat for trade with the Bay. The season for hunting changed due to new trade practices. Hunting was replaced by trapping from November until Christmas. Finally, the hunting season moved into the New Year.

TRAPPING

Traditionally, dead falls and snares were used for trapping. Beavers and muskrat were the main animals trapped in this area. Fox, mink, lynx, wolverine and marten were trapped during the winter months. Snares were set for rabbits, and sometimes ptarmigan.

The women set rabbit snares mainly in the fall when rabbits were abundant, and their skins were used to make winter clothing. Rabbit snares were made mostly of caribou sinew. Snares had to be checked often, as crows and owls would often eat snared rabbits. Rabbit and ptarmigan snares could be set in other seasons as well, if food supplies were running low, or if a change of diet was desired.

Dead fall traps were used by the people long ago for larger fur bearing animals. One log was placed over another and supported by a stick. Animals, such as the lynx, mink, fox, wolverine and marten were trapped in this way. They were trapped by the men throughout the winter months when hunting in an area was finished, but the women were still occupied with drying the meat and preparing the skins from the hunt.

In later years, more emphasis was put on trapping, as the furs became an important item of trade with the Bay. Then trapping became a full time occupation, from early November, when the people left their fishing camps, until Christmas. Now a good trapper can get over 100 marten in a season, but in those days 30 was considered a good catch. Jimmy Thompson remembered that, in his best season in those days, he got 42 marten.

Spring was also an important time for trapping. Traditionally, the Delta people trapped rats from mid-May until the middle or end of June. At the same time, the Mountain people trapped beaver near the head of the Peel River.

In 1917, ratting gained importance. At a time when a marten pelt sold for $2, muskrat skins sold for 10 cents each, rising through the years to 45 cents, or even 50 cents for a particularly good skin. In recent years, they have sold for as much as $7 a skin.

Muskrat were plentiful, and fairly easy to trap. As prices rose, it became possible to make a good wage during the spring ratting season. It was not long before all the Loucheux, including the women, were setting traps in the Delta. The meat from the muskrats could be eaten, but was usually fed to the dogs. The skins were

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stretched, and dried for trade. Before break-up, traps were set through the ice on the lake. As break-up approached, the traps were removed and set along the shore.

Traps were often lost, as they were washed away by spring floods. After break-up, the men set off in the late afternoon, trapping through the night from small canoes. The women woke up when the men returned early in the morning, and began the long job of skinning the rats.

Before the 1960's people "owned" their own traplines. There was little or no interference from others coming into their area. Most trappers resisted trapline registration.

FISHING

The fishing season lasted from late July, when the people returned from McPherson to their fishing camps, until after freeze-up in late October or November. Fish were netted, speared, hooked or caught in fish wheels or traps. Occasionally, when people were on the move, fish were shot.

Usually, when the people returned to their fishing camps, they had to build a new fish house. The frame for this house was made of willow branches or small trees and covered with layered sheets of bark. This building was used for smoking fish. Some people recall using half of their own bark home for this purpose, rather than building a separate fish house. A smoke house was merely a smaller version of a bark home.

As soon as the fish house was ready, the women were left to prepare the camp while the men set the nets. Traditionally, these nets were made from the soft, greenish-white inner bark of willows. In early June, or July, when the sap was running, the people took off the tops of willows, and carefully peeled off the inner bark. This was soaked in water every day, then torn apart into threads, which were tied together into long strips. The soaking process caused the lining to change to a wine color. When many of these threads had been prepared, one person began to knit a net. Since the threads broke easily when being worked, it took a long time to finish a net. The finished net, however, was very strong. In later years, cotton twine purchased from the Bay was used for making nets, though these nets were not as strong. The Bay sold commercially made nets but these were not as readily available.

Before freeze up, the men set the nets in eddies. Setting nets after freeze up was more difficult. Two holes were cut through the ice, then a long pole, with a string at one end, was pushed down through one hole, and pulled out through the second hole, bringing the string through as well. For longer nets the process was repeated. Finally, the string was untied from the pole, and the net was tied to the other end of the string. By pulling the string through, the net was set. Stones were tied to the bottom edge of the net and wooden floats to the top edge so the net would hang in a vertical position. Nets were checked often to ensure that the fish which were caught would not spoil in the net.

Fish traps were used only in shallow waters. These were a type of weir made of poles, placed closed together. They were used in the fall, during freeze-up, and when the fish returned downstream after spawning.
At least three fish wheels were used close to Old Crow on the Yukon River. These were used to catch fish travelling upstream in late July to spawn. Andrew Kunnizzi made himself a fish wheel. It was about 4 metres in diameter, and turned by the current. The wheel would scoop up fish and put them in a box, where Andrew would pick them up and carry them to his camp, a short distance away.

Andrew Kunnizzie

Spears, made from bone, were commonly used. Hooks, attached to lines made of caribou skin, were sometimes set under the ice.

Several varieties of fish were caught. Inconnu runs occurred in October. Whitefish were netted under the ice in late October and early November. The loche run came next. Hooks were set under the ice after dark and many loche were caught each night. The roe and liver were saved for human consumption, but the fish itself was fed to the dogs. Northern Pike, grayling and a few salmon are also found in the McPherson area, but did not form an important part of the diet of the Loucheux.

Most of the fish caught in late summer and early fall were preserved either by drying or smoking. In preparation for drying, the fish were first filleted, then scored and hung to dry. Much of the dry fish was later used for dog food and the rest was saved for eating during the winter.

Fish grease, or oil, was made by boiling fish guts. The grease was mixed with fish roe, which had been dried, and packed into bags for use during the winter. In August some fish were cooked, dried and pounded into a powder. This powder was mixed with fish oil and cranberries. The mixture was packed into birchbark containers for later use.

In the fall some fish were smoked, and later still in the season fish were frozen. Stores of fish were sometimes buried in large pits or piled on stages outside the homes.

Traditionally, the Loucheux fished for their own use. Stores of fish were used to feed both people and dogs, particularly when they headed into the mountains to hunt. In later years, however, the Loucheux also fished to supply the Hudson's Bay store. In September, a representative from the Hudson's Bay travelled to various camps to collect bales of dry fish, which the Loucheux had been gathering through the summer. At the beginning of November, a second trip to the camps was made, this time to collect frozen fish. Though the exact price of dry fish is not remembered, it was recalled that a "stick" of frozen fish (12 fish bound together) sold for 50 cents. It was common practice for the Loucheux to exchange quantities of their fish for extra provisions from the Bay.

TRADITIONAL LIFE

TRADITIONAL ROLES

Traditionally, men were responsible for hunting, trapping and building the various things the family needed such as sleds, frames for boats, canoes, snowshoes and other tools.

It is generally agreed among the Loucheux that the women had more work to do than the men. It was up to them to preserve the meat and fish, and to clean and tan the skins of the animals. Cooking and sewing were considered women's work. They sewed all the clothing required by their family, often adding elaborate decorations. They also completed the moose skin boats and birch bark canoes, by sewing the skins or sheets of bark over the frames. The women often set snares for rabbits, and later joined the men in setting traps for muskrats. The job of skinning the rats, and stretching the skins was left to the women. Fishing also was carried out by both men and women.

Boys went hunting, trapping and fishing with their fathers as soon as they were able to keep up to the others. They learned how to do these jobs by watching, and later imitating the men. A high point, or graduation time, for the boys was when they shot their first caribou or moose. The boy's family would then hold a feast at the summer gathering to honor him. After that, the boy would hunt with the men as an equal.

From the age of six or eight, girls began to learn the skills required of a woman. Mothers and other female relatives taught the girls how to cook, how to clean and tan skins, and, most important, how to sew. The girls were expected to look after younger children, and sometimes they took the dogs to bring back animals shot by the men. Bringing dry wood to the camp was often their responsibility. Girls were taught to be quiet, and not draw attention to themselves.

Young children learned their lessons as well. They were taught to be obedient. They were taught to be quiet, too, especially in the presence of men or the elderly. If a child seriously misbehaved, he was spanked with willows. Children between the ages of four and six were wakened early by their parents. It was their job to make a fire in the tent, then to go outside with neither shoes nor parka. This was done to make the child tough and able to survive in the cold.

Everyone took part in setting up a new camp. In the winter, the women located a suitable spot to set up a tent. They did this by removing their snowshoes and feeling about with their moccasined feet. The snow, in an area the size of the tent, was tramped down with snowshoes, then the boys dug it out. When they had done this, they went to gather wood for the fire. The girls, meanwhile, gathered brush which they layered on the floor of the tent. They often helped the boys to collect firewood. The men set up the frames for the tent. The women dug up the mud which was used to build in the centre of the tent for the fire.

TRADITIONAL VALUES

Long ago, people wasted nothing. Everything was saved; everything had a purpose. Food was shared by all. They also believed that if you did not listen or do what you were told, you would not live long.

Children and women were expected to be very quiet, and to listen to and help older people. Old people were well looked after by the women and children. The Loucheux believed that the elders had given the secrets of life to their children, therefore, anything the children had when they grew up belonged not to them, but to their parents.

Until about the age of sixteen, when girls married, girls and boys were kept apart by their parents. Marriages were arranged by the girl's parents. Sometimes arrangements were made just between the parents of the boy and girl, or sometimes the boy asked his parents for a particular girl. Often the girl did not know the boy she was to marry. Both arrangements and weddings frequently took place during the summer visits to McPherson. Often arrangements for marriages among the Mountain People took place at the spring meeting at the head of the Peel River.

People buried their own dead, wrapping them in hide and placing them on a stage or in a shallow grave.

In the early 1900's, Loucheux lay ministers "rode circuits" from camp to camp. They taught people about the Christian religion, and performed baptisms.

TRADITIONAL GOVERNMENT

The head man for each group determined the activities of the group. Being chief was a hereditary responsibility, handed down from father to son. Only recently, the chief and band council were told by the government that they had to have elections every two years for chief.

Johnny Kaye

Mary Firth Sr.

TRADITIONAL TOOLS

Traditionally, bows and arrows were used for hunting moose and caribou. The bow and arrow shafts were made from birch. The point of the arrow was made of stone. Scrapers were made of sharpened stone, or caribou leg bones that had been split and sharpened with a file. Flint was used to make fires.

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Birch bark was used to make bowls, pots and cups. Spruce gum was put on the inside of these utensils to seal the seams. Large pieces of wood were carved or scraped out to form plates or shovels.

Hooks and needles were made from bones. Spruce roots or babiche were used for sewing seams, or tying frames. Rope was made from braided strips of caribou skin.

TRADITIONAL MEDICINE

Traditionally, many different plants and animal parts were used as medicine. Some of these are still used by the Loucheux today, but many medicines have been forgotten. A few which are remembered are listed here.

Bone grease was put over the eyebrows to relieve head pain. Stones were heated and placed on a painful area to heal it. Spruce gum was heated, melted down, then put on sores to draw out infection.

HOLIDAYS AND SPECIAL DAYS

Spring

The Mountain People held celebrations when they met at the head of the Peel River. Marriages were often arranged at this time.

Summer

Near the end of June, people began arriving in town. Approximately two weeks were spent selling furs, paying debts, buying goods for the next year and celebrating. People visited friends and relatives whom they hadn't seen in a year. There were feasts, and traditional games were played. Sports events were held each night, and dances were held occasionally. Inuit who came to trade at the Fort were included in the celebrations.

Rat Sunday was a special offering day. People would give rat, beaver, or moose skins to the church as a "Thanksgiving" offering. This thanksgiving day was celebrated in June, at the end of ratting season.

On July First there were foot races, canoe races, football games, tug-of-wars and a dance.

Between July 1 and July 15 the steamer came bringing flour, sugar, tea and the Bishop. It would stay two to five days. All the men in town would help unload the steamer. Everyone would be dressed up to meet the Bishop. There was a dance every night that the steamer was in town. Marriages were often performed at this time.

After the steamer left, the chief would put on a big feast to which everyone would bring their own plate and spoon. After tea the chief would say in a loud voice, "We have had our bodies fed by the food the steamer brought for the whole year. The Bishop has come to feed our souls. Now we are ready to go to our fish camps. No one is to stay in town. Everybody go out to your camps to fish." After this, there was a dance and by July 15 everyone had left for their fish camps.

Periodically, especially in the early years, a number of Loucheux went to Dawson to trade, rather than to McPherson. Here, July 1 was also celebrated, and a steamboat arrived carrying fresh food among its supplies. Fresh food was never seen in McPherson at that time. Here too, the Loucheux met with the Moose Hide Indians. The chief of each tribe gave a feast and games and dances were enjoyed by all.

Winter

In the early years of the missionaries, people gathered together in the mountains to celebrate Christmas and New Years. A feast was put on by the chief, and traditional games were played. On New Years Eve it was customary for the men to go moose or caribou hunting. In later years, the people travelled to McPherson to celebrate this holiday season.

On a much smaller scale, each group held a celebration whenever they established a new hunting camp.

TRADITIONAL GAMES AND ENTERTAINMENT

Storytelling

Stories were passed down from generation to generation. As there was no form of writing in the old days, this was not only entertaining, but also an important way of preserving history, tradition, and folklore. Traditional songs were also sung.

Dancing

Traditional dances and drum music are part of the Loucheux culture. However, even the elders living in McPherson today remember dancing to fiddle music all their lives. Some of these dances included the Red River Jig, Heel of Eight, Duck Dance, Double Jig, Handkerchief Dance, Rabbit Dance and Drop of Brandy Dance. Most of these dances were learned from the Hudson's Bay people.

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Gambling

Christie Thompson remembered a form of gambling without cards. People played for tobacco, furs, shells, traps, etc.

Three-Base

This was a form of baseball played by the children. The ball was made of moose hide, and stuffed with moose hair.

Blanket Toss

A caribou skin was tied to four trees by lengths of rope made from braided caribou skin. One person stood on the hide, while the others caused the hide to bounce. This was done by either pulling at the ropes, or at the trees to which the ropes were tied. This caused the person on the hide to jump, sometimes as high as 10-12 metres. As long as the person was jumping, the bystanders sang.

A variation of this was when the person stood on the ground, and jumped onto the hide after the others started pulling. Tradition holds that the raising of the four posts for the blanket toss causes a warm spell, even in mid-winter.

Nilierick

This was a stick-pull game played only by the men, usually in the mountains during the winter. The stick was made of birch. It took a long time to make the stick. First it was burned a bit, then it was greased with caribou fat. The object of the game was to put the stick out of the partner's hands.

Football

Football was also played by the men. In McPherson, games were often held between the Loucheux and the Inuit. They played for a bag of tobacco and some matches which the Chief purchased from the Bay. Sometimes, the games lasted all day and throughout the night.

Others

Other games and competitions included hide-and-go-seek, swinging, foot races, canoe races, wrestling, and hockey.

EARLY CONTACT

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THE INUIT

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CONTACT WITH THE INUIT

People who lived off the land were generally too busy surviving to have much time to fight each other, so throughout history they usually stayed out of each other's territories.

Strangers were always treated with suspicion and misunderstanding, even slight ones could result in fighting.

It's not surprising, therefore, that there were fights between the Loucheux and the Inuit of the Mackenzie delta region. These were two different blood lines and two different cultures. It's true that there were also similarities between the Loucheux and the Inuit but the differences predominated.

Trouble between the Loucheux and the Inuit started for a number of reasons. Sickness was not well understood and was often attributed to witchcraft which someone else had used against the sick person. The relatives of the sick person would then seek revenge. Any killing sparked more revenge killings.

Another cause of trouble was wife stealing. The very good hunters wished to have several wives for reasons of prestige. These extra wives were obtained by convincing wives to leave their husbands or by kidnap and murder. History books tell of several instances of this happening and causing bloody feuds.

However, large scale fighting was not possible unless the people were wealthy and comfortable enough to have the time and the numbers to fight. This situation did exist for the Mackenzie Inuit who lived in one of the richest areas inhabited by Inuit with its bounty of seals, walrus and whales as well as caribou, muskox, and moose.

With this supply of food the Mackenzie Inuit were able to live in large bands for much of the year and have an elaborate social life.

The Inuit of the Mackenzie were exuberant by nature and also bigger than most Inuit. They were adventurous and would go far up the Mackenzie to hunt and for stone for implements. Here they met the Loucheux and other Dene with whom they traded and fought.

Through this trading with the Inuit, who had contact with Russian traders in what is now Alaska, the Loucheux got Russian trade goods some time before traders reached them from the south via the Mackenzie River.

In spite of this trading which was mutually beneficial to the Inuit and the Loucheux, things remained touchy between them. In 1852, the Loucheux massacred many Inuit at Separation Point. This incident is blamed on two Hudson's Bay company workers who shot the Inuit leader just after the Inuit fired their arrows into the sand of the riverbank to show friendship.[1]

It is not to be thought that it was only the Mackenzie Inuit and the Loucheux who were unfriendly. There were hostilities between several Indian peoples and the Inuit, notably the Cree, and also fighting between various Indian groups.

"Hostilities between the Peel River Kutchin and other Indian peoples are mentioned in tradition, but the paramount enemy was the Mackenzie Eskimo."[2] Apparently, there was a time when the two groups of people hunted and lived side by side, however, something later came about to change this. Three different reasons are given for this break in peaceful relations, "(1) a contest of hunting magic between a Kutchin and his Eskimo trading-partner; (2) the defrauding of an Eskimo in trade by a Kutchin; (3) the ravishing of a Kutchin girl by an Eskimo."[3]

Present tradition implies that following this break-down in relations there was a wide neutral ground between the Peel River Kutchin and Eskimo territories. Each group of people raided far into the other's territory.

Residence in the neutral territory was considered suicide as some stories illustrate:

> "In one tale, an elderly couple of the generation prior to the building of Fort McPherson lost their only son in an Eskimo raid. Intending to either win revenge or die at the hands of the enemy, they camped alone on the Middle Peel Channel between Husky River and the Mackenzie. The other story, related by both Kutchin and Eskimo informants, explains the name of Rotten Eye Portage on Husky River. An Eskimo afflicted with a painfully suppurating eye and finding life intolerable, moved to that location hoping to be found and killed by the Peel River Kutchin."[4]

This conflict between the Inuit and the Dene caused the trading companies some difficulty in establishing posts that could serve both groups of people.

In times of peace, the Loucheux traded directly with the Inuit and other Dene groups. In exchange for furs, particularly wolverine pelts, the Loucheux received prized ivory beads from the Inuit. These were worn only by Chiefs or important people. References are also made to trading meat and skins with Moosehide Indians, when the Loucheux visited Dawson.

Christopher Collins recalls that the Inuit he encountered in the Delta many years ago had a small bone hanging from their lip or cheek. Since Inuit no longer carry on this tradition, Christopher muses, "Does this mean that there are no more Eskimos?"

In later years, the Bay and the missionaries encouraged friendship between the Loucheux and the Inuit. For a time, both groups traded in McPherson. Sports events between the two groups were popular. When trading posts were established on the Arctic Coast, the Inuit no longer had reason to travel as far as McPherson.

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[1] Keith J. Crowe. A History of the Original People of Northern Canada. Page 26-91.

[2] Richard Slobodin. Band Organization of the Peel River Kutchin - Bulletin 179. page 18. (The Loucheux were originally known by their own name for themselves which was Kutchin. Loucheux is the French translation of name of one band of Kutchin the "Takudh Kutchin" or the "people of the slanting eyes").

[3] Ibid, page 18.

[4] Ibid, page 19.

THE EXPLORERS

CONTACT WITH THE EXPLORERS

Alexander Mackenzie - 1789

Mackenzie left in search of a river that flowed from the West end of Great Slave Lake, that he hoped would carry him to the Pacific Ocean. He hired a guide and progressed downstream meeting Slavey, Dogrib, and Hare Indians. He reached the head of the Delta, and to his disappointment, realized he had reached the Arctic Ocean. On his way back, he questioned Indians about the land to the west and learned vaguely of the Yukon River.

Following this trip, the North West Company established several trading posts along the Mackenzie River. The most northerly one was at Fort Good Hope in 1805. In 1823, this post was moved farther down river for the convenience of the Loucheux.

Although it was hoped this post would serve the Inuit as well, few if any Inuit succeeded in reaching the post, because of the determined opposition of the Kutchin. In 1831, Sir George Thompson reports that, "The trade of Fort Good Hope, I am sorry to say, has suffered this last season from hostilities between the Esquimaux and Loucheux."[1]

Duncan Livingston and James Sutherland - 1799

A second attempt was made to travel down the Mackenzie in 1799 by these explorers. This entire party was killed by the Inuit.

John Clarke - 1809

Clarke, an employee of the North West Company posts on the Mackenzie River, descended the Mackenzie and reached the Delta, before he was obliged to return because of the "menacing attitude" of the Inuit on both banks of the river.

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[1] Richard Slobodin. Band Organization of the Peel River Kutchin - Bulletin 179. page 20.

Sir John Franklin - 1825 - 1827

On this British Arctic Land Expedition, Franklin's party explored the Mackenzie Delta to the east and west of Point Separation. During this expedition, Franklin discovered and explored the Peel River for a short distance, naming it in honor of Sir Robert Peel, the then Secretary of State for the Home Department.

John Bell - 1839, 1840/41, 1842 and 1845

In 1839, John Bell travelled from Fort Good Hope to make a preliminary investigation of the Peel River and to tell the Indians that the Company (H.B.C.) intended to build a post there in 1840. He spent two months on the Peel River, then returned to the Delta to explore Rat River. This he explored as far as McDougall Pass, where he met and bartered with the Indians. He then returned to Fort Good Hope.

In 1840, Bell and Alexander Kennedy Isbister surveyed the Peel River and surrounding area and established a H.B.C. fort there. This fort was first known as Peel's River Fort or Fort Bell but was later named Fort McPherson. Isbister travelled overland from the post to Arctic Red River, and then descended this river to the Mackenzie. Isbister made observations on plants, animals and geology, which he later published.

In 1842, Bell left McPherson and after a five day march across the Richardson Mountains discovered the Bell River, which he descended for five days. He returned to the fort, believing that the overland route was much too difficult to make communication with Bell River practical.

In 1845, determined to expand the H.B.C. trade west, Bell once again made the five day trek across the Richardson Mountains from Peel River to Bell River. He then built canoes and descended Bell River to its confluence with the Porcupine River. From there he descended the Porcupine until he joined the Yukon River. Unaware of the importance of his discovery, he turned back. On his return, he met Indians who assured him that there were no Russian traders in the area. In 1847, the Company decided to establish a post in the region of Bell's discoveries. John Bell was succeeded at the Peel River post by George Deschambeault.

James Pruden and John Lee Lewes - 1843

In 1843, Pruden made another attempt to find a route across the Richardson Mountains, having been told by an indian that there was one. The indian, however, abandoned the party and they turned back.

Alexander Hunter Murray - 1847

Murray followed the path travelled by Bell from Fort McPherson two years earlier. He established a post at Fort Yukon on July 1. Indians came to trade soon after that. This post was moved several times until it finally was located in the present-day Yukon Territory.

W. J. S. Pullen and W. H. Hooper - 1849

In September 1849, the Peel River post was visited by Lieutenant W. J. S. Pullen and Lieutenant W. J. Hooper, of the Franklin Search Expedition, commanded by Captains Moose and Kellett. Pullen and Hooper had left the expedition near Wainright Inlet on July 25, 1849, and had travelled in boats along the North American coast to the estuary of the Mackenzie River. At the time of their visit, the post was in charge of William Lucas Hardisty, who had been entrusted with its affairs during the temporary absence of Mr. A. R. Peers on the usual summer journey to Fort Simpson with the fur returns. Pullen and Hooper expected to winter in the Mackenzie River District and then, with the Hudson's Bay Company's assistance, return to England by way of York Factory. However, orders were received from the Admiralty to continue their search by boats in the summer of 1850. They again visited Peel River post in September 1850, when Alexander Mackenzie was in temporary charge.

Robert Campbell - 1851

Robert Campbell set out to continue exploration of the Pelly River. He discovered it was a tributary of the Yukon River. While discovering the mouths of several other rivers, he came into contact with several Indians who had never seen white men before. After reaching Fort Yukon, Campbell continued up Porcupine River to La Pierre's House, travelled on foot to Fort McPherson, and then ascended the Mackenzie to Fort Simpson.

Robert Kennicott - 1859 - 1862

Kennicott was sent by the Smithsonian Institute and Audubon Club of Chicago to make zoological collections from the Mackenzie District and Yukon Territory. He travelled down the Mackenzie River and, by way of the Peel and Porcupine Rivers, to Fort Yukon where he wintered. As well as obtaining large collections of birds and animals, Kennicott made many valuable observations on the fur trade.

James McDougall - 1872

The Hudson's Bay Company sent McDougall to find a more suitable line of communication between the Mackenzie River and Yukon River drainage systems than the winter portage route of about 120 km between Fort McPherson on the Peel River and LaPierre's House on the Bell River. The route he discovered, known as the McDougall Pass, was only about 55 km between the Rat and Bell Rivers. It had in fact been discovered 30 years earlier by Bell and Isbister but had not been surveyed then. The McDougall Pass was later used by considerable numbers of prospectors during the Klondike gold rush of 1897-99.

Richard George McConnell - 1887-88

On a Canadian Yukon exploring expedition, McConnell travelled through Fort McPherson and across the McDougall Pass to Fort Yukon. He made observations on the geology, fauna and flora of the region as well as surveying the entire route he took.

William Ogilvie - 1887-89

Also on the Yukon exploring expedition, Ogilvie travelled from the Yukon River to the Tatonduk River and the Porcupine River then through the McDougall Pass to Peel River and finally Fort McPherson. From there he surveyed the Mackenzie and Slave Rivers to Fort Chipewyan.

Elizabeth Taylor - 1892

Miss Taylor travelled by Hudson Bay Company steamer down the Athabasca, Slave and Mackenzie Rivers to Fort McPherson and back. During the journey, she made collections of birds, mammals, fish, insects and plants.

Frank Russell - 1893-94

Russell studied the Mackenzie District. He travelled alone from Fort Rae down the Mackenzie River to Fort McPherson. From there, he continued to Herschel Island with Sainville. During his expedition, Russell made ethnological observations on the Indians and Eskimos, and made extensive natural history notes and collections.

Andrew Jackson Stone - 1897-99

Stone was sent on a zoological expedition from the U.S. He began his work in B.C. then travelled north down the Liard River to Fort Simpson, visiting the Nahanni Mountains on his way. He then descended the Mackenzie River to Fort Norman, from where he visited the Rocky Mountains with Indians to collect specimens of mountain sheep. Continuing north to Peel River, he visited Fort McPherson and made another trip into the Rockies and one into the Delta. Finally he set off via the Porcupine and Yukon Rivers to Alaska.

Richard Slobodin

Richard Slobodin travelled to Fort McPherson in 1938, 1946 and 1961. He left detailed accounts of these trips.

THE
FUR
TRADERS

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CONTACT WITH THE FUR TRADERS

Not until 1840 was a Hudson's Bay Company post established on the lower Peel River. For the first twenty years of its existence it was visited by only a small number of Peel River people. There were several reasons for this: 1) winter hunting grounds were far from the post; 2) hunting was still more important than trapping at that time; 3) the post was located in the dangerous neutral ground between the Peel River Loucheux and the Inuit.

During the gold rush period, many hunters went to trade in the Yukon. However, not all the Peel River people did this. Those who remained behind, including most of the beaver hunters on the lower Peel, were encouraged by the rise in fur prices and extended their trapping activities beyond anything then known on the Peel. They traded with the American whalers wintered at Herschel Island and the nearby coast between 1890 and 1907. This trade might have marked an important era in the Peel area, had it not coincided with the Klondike gold rush.

The Muskrat Period, 1917 - 1947

The price of muskrat pelts rose rapidly during this period, from 40 cents in 1914 to $1.50 in 1920. After a slight slump in postwar times, the price continued to rise until 1929.

Ratting is a spring time activity, from early March until late May or early June. As the importance of the muskrat increased, hunters tried to be on the lower Peel River, or in the Delta, by the end of February. Families, therefore, did not travel as far up the Peel during the fall and winter and came downriver on the ice in late winter. This led to a decline in the use and importance of the moose skin boat, as the people were coming down the river long before open water. The last mooseskin boat used by the Loucheux was steered down the river by Chief Francis in 1923.

Revival of Hunting

In 1945, after a rise in fur prices and a peak in the marten population, more than 30 families were marten hunting. These people stayed in the mountains from freeze-up to break-up, therefore missing part of the muskrat season. This was the first time in 22 years that any Peel people had passed the entire winter in the mountains upriver.

In 1946, the first steps were made for trap-line registration. A game warden in Aklavik was present to see that all trappers established a given territory for trapping. This caused anxiety and opposition as people preferred a more flexible trapping situation.

THE HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY

Early Days at Fort McPherson - (This entire section taken from "Early Days at Fort McPherson", by Ethel Stewart in The Beaver, Winter 1954, pp. 39 to 41.)

The Loucheux people were involved in choosing the site for the original Hudson's Bay Trading Post. The Bay people wanted to build the post on the side of the river which had higher banks, but the Loucheux insisted that it be built on the opposite side. At this time, there were many skirmishes between the Inuit and the Dene, and the original site was chosen because it afforded a 19 km view down the river. Eventually, as this site flooded often, the post was moved to a new location, several miles down the river.

The Bay people hoped to get furs from both the Loucheux and the Inuit, but because of hostile feelings between the two groups, few Inuit came in the first years of the Bay. The Bay, along with the Church, did much to discourage this antagonism. In later years, Inuit did trade in McPherson until posts were established further north.

The Bay depended on the Loucheux for far more than the furs they traded. The Loucheux supplied the Bay people with dry meat and fish to supplement their diet. They acted as guides for the Bay, and were hired to man the early Bay boats. Loucheux were hired to track the York boats upstream. One year, when supplies ran out, 28 men and 4 captains were hired to take whale boats to Fort Smith for more supplies. They left in May, and returned in early fall. People were paid in goods, rather than money, for their services. One man recalls payment of a cast iron kettle, a handkerchief and a gun for the trip to Fort Smith. He was "happy and satisfied with it."

People generally came to the Bay to trade after the spring trapping season. When they arrived, there were few supplies in the Bay, as the new supply ship had not yet arrived. Available goods were divided evenly among the people, and the remaining payments for fur were made when the new supplies arrived. Goods generally consisted of flour, sugar, tea, tobacco and shells. The people also came to depend on ready-made fish nets, or twine for making nets, guns and traps from the Bay. Glass beads quickly replaced traditional beads, porcupine quills and moosehair tufting.

John and Catherine Firth and grandchild

Some people report that they got assistance from the Bay when things were particularly difficult. When people ran out of food during the winter, they would sometimes come to McPherson for additional supplies. It was not unusual at such times to receive some dry fish for dog food, without charge from the Bay. William Nerysoo also recalls one summer when he and Donald stayed in McPherson to build his log house. Fishing in the area was poor, and they often went hungry. "Old man Firth" (the Bay Manager) gave them 5 cups of flour. William saw this as an act of generosity.

Through the influence of the Bay, the Loucheux came to depend greatly on trapping. Hunting and fishing also came to be largely for barter, and less for subsistence.

It is one hundred and fifteen years since the first Hudson's Bay Company boat entered the waters of Peel River for the purpose of extending the trade into this wealthy fur region. The exploratory journey of John Bell on Peel River in 1839, the establishment of Fort McPherson in 1840, and Bell's subsequent exploration of the Rat, the Bell, and the Porcupine Rivers are facts well known in the history of the Canadian North West.

The Indians of Peel River have an interesting account of the coming of the first boat into their Territory. Old Mrs. Louisa Neil related this story of the event to her daughter-in-law, Mrs. Sarah Simon of Fort McPherson, so that she might tell it to me. Mrs. Neil was then eighty-three years of age, and died the following year, in August, 1951.

When Mrs. Neil's grandfather was a young man, he was fishing near the mouth of the Peel, when he found a piece of wood sawn at both ends. He examined it and wondered how it could have been cut in this fashion. When he showed it to his companions, and they had excitedly discussed their find, they decided that it must have come down the "Big River," and they determined to find the men who had means of cutting trees in this way. Ascending the "Big River," they came to the Hudson's Bay post at Fort Good Hope. They saw wonderful things which the Company men had for trade, and after this, the Peel River people made occasional trips to Fort Good Hope to buy the white man's goods--especially beads which were prized above all else by the Loucheux Indians. The trips were not frequent because of the danger of Eskimo war parties intercepting them at the mouth of the Peel, and at Point Separation. But the reports and evidence of the wealth of furs to be obtained at Peel River had already caused the Company to take steps towards the establishment of a trading post in that country.

A lone Loucheux in his little bark canoe saw the big wooden York boat coming up Peel River. He was afraid, but was persuaded by the Hudson's Bay men to come in to shore, though he kept close to the bush so that if need arose he might escape. Presents of beads, a kettle, and a knife reassured him, and he agreed to hurry to Trail Creek, where his tribe lived before the building of the fort, and give warning of the approach of the strangers and their friendly intent.

The Indian people and their children were very much excited as the huge boat drew near. Some seized bows and arrows, and some ran off into the bush. An old Slavey woman, who knew something of the language of the Peel River people, had come with the Hudson's Bay men to tell of the good things they had brought--tobacco, tea and luskee or snuff. The latter was wound up like rope in bundles the size of a ten gallon keg, and was measured off. A piece the length of a man's closed fist and extended thumb sold for one beaver, three rats, or two weasels. It took two bales to supply everyone, so the Trail River camp must have been large. After trading, the white men went up the Peel River to see the country and to hunt.

Now, the Indians all came down the river to help the white men build a fort. Legend says that there were so many people that the land of the chosen site sank with the weight. Probably this story arose from the successive flooding that made it necessary, some years later, to move the fort four miles down stream. The white men wished to build the fort on the west bank because the land was higher there, but the Indians told them that from that side it would not be possible to see the approach of Eskimo war parties, whereas the east bank commands a clear view for many miles down stream. Consequently, the fort was built on the east bank of the Peel River. The Hudson's Bay men now chose a chief to lead the people in obtaining furs for trade. Vitrsi-ne Tsui Tye was the first chief. He had four boys, one of whom was chief after him and the father of old Mrs. Neil who related this tale.

In 1887, the big wooden supply boats, that had to be tracked upstream, were replaced by steamers. For nearly sixty years, the arrival of the Hudson's Bay Company's steamboat was an annual event anticipated by the people of Peel River. Indeed, one of the Indian families took the word Steamboat for a surname.

Mrs. Sarah Simon, my principal informant on life in the old days at Peel River, came to my house one evening in March 1952 to tell me how the people lived fifty years ago, and how they came to depend on the arrival of the supply boat each year. Every year at the end of June, the Indians came into the fort to sell their fur and to await the coming of the boat, which usually arrived sometime before the middle of July. The arrival and departure of the boat was heralded and speeded in the customary manner of all arrivals and departures of importance--by startling volleys of gunfire from the shore. After the boat left, people stocked up with fishing gear, tea, sugar, tobacco, flour, baking powder, and lump sugar, some hardware, and hunting supplies. The head chief then gave a feast and told his people to go fishing.

Nearly everyone would leave for their camps up and down Peel River to fish for connies (inconnus) and whitefish. These were filleted, slashed in parallel strips and hung on racks in the sun or in the smoke house to dry. Tree roots were used to tie the fish in bundles of fifty whitefish or twenty to thirty connies. Bags of dried fish roe, and oil extracted by boiling the intestines, were put away for winter. In August, fish were cooked, dried and pounded into powder that was mixed with oil and cranberries, then packed in birch bark containers for winter use.

In September, while the moose and caribou were still fat, families moved into the mountains to put up pemmican and dried meat, and make babiche for snowshoes, and to tan skins for clothing.

Sarah Simon

When the connie run began in October, the Indians returned to the river, often putting away forty fish per day. After the river froze, nets were set under the ice for whitefish. The roe was put in large containers and frozen for winter use, and the frozen whitefish were also stored away. The loach (loche) run came next. Hooks were set under the ice after dark, and many were caught each night. The roe and the liver, which is nearly as large as that of a caribou, were saved for human food, and the fish itself was fed to the dogs. The liver was boiled slowly for about two hours. The oil was skimmed off and saved, and the cooked liver was packed in the cleansed intestine of the fish and frozen.

Next, the women set snares for rabbits. The skin was cut in strips and braided to make clothing for women and children. Men's clothing was made of the summer skins of caribou. At this time of year, the men made snowshoe frames and sleds from birch wood, and wooden containers and snowshovels which looked like giant butter ladles. In November, they set traps for foxes, mink, wolverine, lynx and marten. Nearly everyone came into the fort for Christmas, and stayed until after the New Year, buying supplies, visiting, dancing, and attending church services.

In January, everyone went over the mountains for caribou, and now they used up their stores of fish. At Easter, the Delta Indians came into the fort, and afterwards went down to the Delta for the spring rat hunt. The Peel River people stayed up river and trapped beaver, and came back to the fort in big skinboats after open water in June, and at the same time--usually at the end of June--the Delta people came in from ratting.

The people now enjoyed a few weeks' holiday, visiting, dancing, playing football and native games all through the bright Arctic nights, attending daily church services and classes in their own language, and in English, at the Anglican Mission School. The occasional wedding dance and feast added to the general happiness of their lives, while they awaited the arrival of the steamboat and another year's supplies.

With numerous embellishments, life follows much the same pattern today. Since 1947, when diesel tugs replaced steamboats, the needs of Fort McPherson have been served by three Hudson's Bay Company boat arrivals per year. The little Stuart Lake (Stewart Lake), called locally the "Banana Boat", though it brings no bananas, follows the ice down river each spring bringing fresh supplies for the northern posts, and usually arrives in Fort McPherson in the first week of June. And the M.S. "Pelican Rapids," a large diesel tug, comes in July and September with barges loaded with goods of various sorts to supply the needs of the following year.

THE CHURCH

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CONTACT WITH THE CHURCH

Since the arrival of Father Grollier in 1860, and the visits of the Anglican Archdeacon Hunter and Reverend Kirby to Fort McPherson in the few years previous to that, missionaries have had a profound influence on the lives of the Loucheux. As the religious beliefs of the Loucheux changed, so too did some of their patterns of living. Sunday became a day of rest. Christian holidays were adopted. Christmas was celebrated in the mountains, and in later years people came to McPherson to celebrate Christmas, which now fell between the new hunting and trapping seasons. Easter, too, became a time to come to McPherson to attend church, and for the confirmed to take communion. Feasts, dances and weddings were held, then the people prepared to go to the Delta for spring ratting.

The missionaries also taught religion to the Loucheux children. Often adults attended classes as well. Winter classes were not conducted in Loucheux, as only one Loucheux family stayed in McPherson during the winter at that time. Lay readers conducted classes in Loucheux during the summer when everyone was in McPherson.

As in many Northern communities, both Anglican and Catholic missionaries were present. In the case of Fort McPherson, official representatives of both churches arrived at about the same time and the competition between them started right there at the beginning. The French-speaking Catholic missionaries likely had converts first. When the Anglicans, who were English-speaking, arrived, some people converted to this religion and a rift became evident. When the Chief declared his decision to support the "English missionary" all but a few of his people followed his lead. Soon after, the Catholics moved to Arctic Red River, where there were already some Catholic Loucheux living, and established a Catholic mission there.

Henri Grollier, O.M.I. 1860 - 1863

Father Grollier travelled widely in the Mackenzie District and established Roman Catholic missions at Fort Resolution, Fort Simpson, Fort Providence, Fort Rae, Fort Norman and Fort Good Hope. He arrived for his first visit to Fort McPherson on September 12, 1860. He returned that fall to Fort Good Hope and came back to Fort McPherson for a short while during the summer of 1861, then returned to Fort Good Hope again where he remained until his death there in 1864.

Reverend William Kirkby 1856-1868

William Kirkby came from England to teach school in Canada's West (probably the Red River settlement) in 1852. In 1856, he was ordained and came to Fort Simpson as a missionary. From 1856 to 1868, Kirkby travelled widely with Fort Simpson as a base. He visited and preached at the settlements along the Mackenzie River, including Fort McPherson, in the Delta and into the Yukon and Alaska. He then returned to York Factory where he was made Archdeacon of Moosonee in 1876.

Archdeacon James Hunter 1858-1859

Originally from England, James Hunter was ordained at La Pas (now The Pas), Manitoba in 1844. Here he worked with Henry Budd, the first native ordained Church of England minister. Hunter and his wife Jean Ross, daughter of the Hudson's Bay factor at La Pas, became fluent in Cree. After becoming Archdeacon of Rupertsland in 1958, Hunter received leave to come to Fort Simpson. Until 1859, Hunter travelled and served in Fort Simpson, Fort Norman and Fort McPherson. He then returned to the Red River settlement.

Jean Seguin, O.M.I. 1862 - 1873

Father Seguin arrived in Fort Good Hope in August, 1861, and made his first visit to Fort McPherson in 1862, arriving the day before Easter. He continued to visit Fort McPherson every year until 1873. For the next 20 years following that, he visited the Catholic Loucheux in Arctic Red River every year. (A Catholic mission was established at Arctic Red River in 1868 at least partially because of opposition to the Catholics in Fort McPherson.)

Reverend Robert MacDonald, 1868 - 1904

Reverend MacDonald of the Church of England (who later became Archdeacon) was partly of Ojibway descent. He came from the Red River country of Manitoba. He was known as an untiring traveller, familiar with the area from the Mackenzie Delta to Fort Yukon and Dawson. He became a master of the Loucheux language and married a Peel River woman, Julia Smith (sister of Old William Smith), known in Loucheux as Gepik (Ooghaii?). She was the daughter of Yegalye.

During MacDonald's absences catechists assumed leadership of prayer meetings, reading from the scriptures and the prayer book, both of which were translated by MacDonald. The catechists were group leaders prior to their church activity, thus their function as catechists enhanced their leadership, as well as the influence of the missionary.

MacDonald remained in McPherson until his retirement in 1904. During this time, he went to England twice to see about the publication of his translations of the Bible and Book of Prayer. His work represented the first time both the Bible and the Book of Prayer were translated in their entity into a native language. Both were published and the translation of the Bible was recently reprinted.

Reverend William C. Bompass 1865 - 1874

Reverend Bompass came to the Mackenzie River region in 1865, arriving in Fort Simpson on Christmas morning, 1865. He travelled widely in the district, including the Yukon, before he was consecrated the first Anglican Bishop of Athabasca on May 3, 1874. The diocese was later split into four sections and Bompass took the northernmost Takudh (Loucheux) mission. When the three northern sections were combined to create the Diocese of Mackenzie River in 1884 he became Bishop of Mackenzie River. When the diocese was divided in 1891 to form the Selkirk (Yukon) Diocese, Bompass moved to the Yukon to become Bishop there.

Constant Giroux, O.M.I. and Camille Lefebvre, O.M.I. 1889 - 1896

In 1889, Father Giroux visited Fort McPherson. In 1890, he built a 19 x 16 foot cabin for use by the Fathers. He was joined in Fort McPherson by Father Lefebvre in 1892 and they both lived there until 1896. In 1896, opposition to their mission in Fort McPherson caused them to transfer the mission to Arctic Red River.

Father Coty, Father Philippe and Father Colas 1930 - 1957

Father Louis Coty was posted to Arctic Red River in 1930 and some time later began travelling to Fort McPherson periodically. Interest in a return of the Roman Catholics to Fort McPherson was expressed and a decision was made by Bishop Trocellier in late 1942 to build a mission house with chapel in Fort McPherson. Father Philippe, with the help of Enoch Moses, cut the logs and laid the foundation in the spring of 1943. The building was done in the summer of 1943 by Brother Tesniere, some local people and some Brothers from Aklavik.

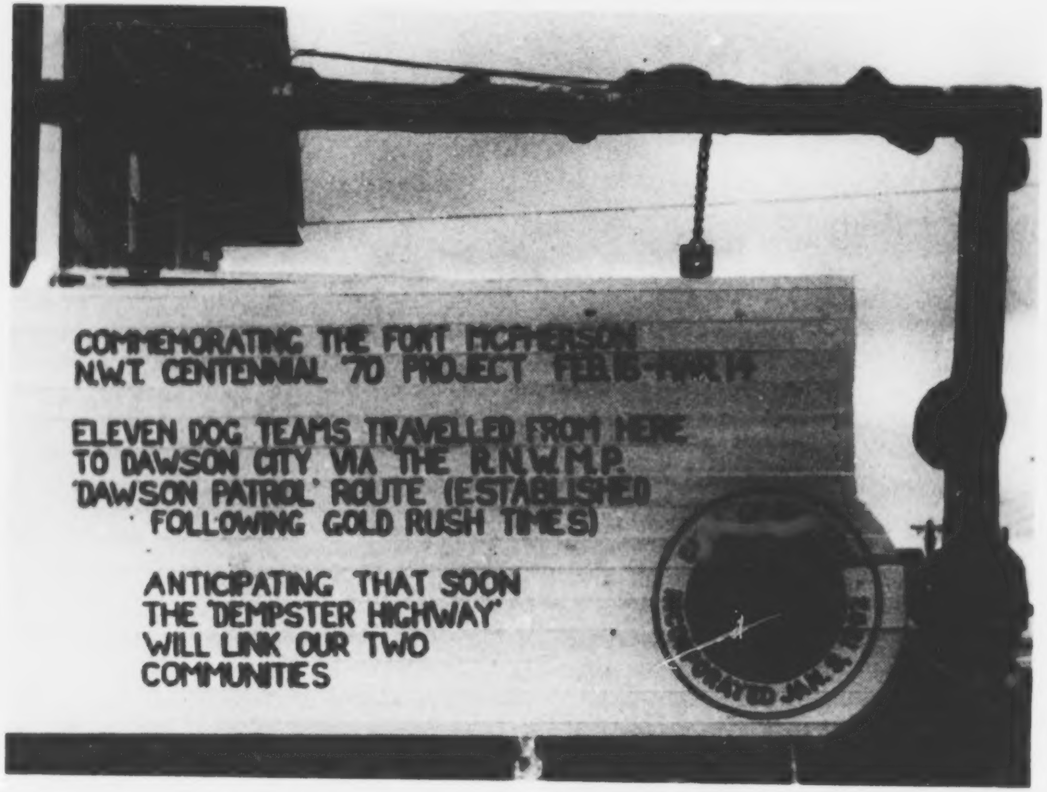
When the mission house was habitable, Father Louis Coty lived there for some time, ministering to the people of Fort McPherson. Father Colas moved to Fort McPherson and lived there until 1957, during which time he provided the settlement with mail service. After Father Colas moved to Aklavik, Fort McPherson has been visited as often as possible, and always at Christmas and Easter, by a Catholic priest from a nearby community.

Anglican Presence in Fort McPherson 1904 - present

Since the retirement of Archdeacon MacDonald in 1904 there has been a continual Anglican presence in Fort McPherson. In fact, from the days of Bishop Bompass until the opening of the Anglican mission in Aklavik in 1919, Fort McPherson served as the center of Anglican operations to all of the Western Arctic. At most times there were several missionaries based in Fort McPherson. Also the missionaries from other communities and the Bishop, all of whom did a great deal of travelling in those days, stopped often in Fort McPherson.

Among the many Anglican clergymen who have served the people of Fort McPherson and the surrounding area since 1904 are Reverend C. E. Whittaker, Bishop J. R. Lucas, Bishop Stringer, Reverend Edward Sittichinli, Reverend Tom Greenwood and the Reverends J. E. Merritt and H. Girling who went out from Fort McPherson to work with the Inuit in Coppermine. To this day almost all of the people in Fort McPherson are Anglican.

(Note: There may be some small discrepancies in this section, caused by imperfect records, failing memories, and the fact that the information is difficult to verify.)


COMMEMORATING THE FORT McPHERSON
N.W.T. CENTENNIAL '70 PROJECT FEB.15-MAR.14
ELEVEN DOG TEAMS TRAVELLED FROM HERE
TO DAWSON CITY VIA THE R.N.W.M.P.
'DAWSON PATROL' ROUTE (ESTABLISHED
FOLLOWING GOLD RUSH TIMES)
ANTICIPATING THAT SOON
THE 'DEMPSTER HIGHWAY'
WILL LINK OUR TWO
COMMUNITIES

THE GOLD SEEKERS AND THE N.W.M.P./ R.C.M.P.

THE GOLD SEEKERS

In 1872, Arthur Harper and Napoleon McQuesten travelled extensively throughout the Mackenzie District and part of the Yukon on a gold prospecting expedition.

Although passages through the Peel River drainage system were minor routes to the gold fields, they were used by quite a few parties following Harper and McQuesten in the years 1898 - 1910. White people following this route were dependent on the Indians for transport and guiding.

Almost every member of the Peel River band had been to the Yukon before the gold rush began. However, the gold-rush period did change the interests of the people somewhat. By the summer of 1901, most of the band, after break-up, went to Dawson for trading, and spent part of the summer at Moosehide which is seven kilometres down the Yukon River to Dawson.

Meat hunting remained the major subsistence activity of the Indians; however, as the price of meat in the mining camps became fantastically inflated they used some of their meat for trade.

In the Peel River culture there is a lively appreciation of the hazards of frontier situations as the people during the gold rush era saw their friends and relatives become demoralized by the bars, pool halls, brothels, motion-pictures, drug stores, banks and pawn shops of Dawson. This was once discussed at length at a meeting with the fervent conclusion that they should not let this happen to them. Many influential persons in the band, including the chief, were still found in the pool and gambling halls of Dawson or Moosehide, however.

By 1910, the richest gold fields had been worked out and in 1911, Chief Julius led a party of people back to McPherson. By 1914, many others had returned to McPherson, thereafter visiting the Yukon towns only after short winter hunting trips.

THE N.W.M.P./R.C.M.P.

G. M. Skirving - N.W.M.P. 1899

Skirving's patrol set off from Dawson for Fort McPherson to search for three gold seekers who had been lost near Porcupine River on their way to the Klondike. He travelled by canoe and steamer down the Yukon River and up the Porcupine River to the Old Crow River where he hired a dog team. From there he pushed on to the Bell River, where he found the bodies of two of the men and satisfied himself that the other one had drowned. On October 1, he continued over the mountains to Fort McPherson. This was the first Mounted Police patrol to link the Yukon and Mackenzie regions.

The Lost Patrol - As told by Ex-Inspector W. J. D. Dempster

Beginning, I think, in the winter of 1904-05, it was the custom to send an RNWMP Patrol from Dawson to Fort McPherson on the Peel River, N.W.T. every winter, leaving Dawson, in the Yukon, at the end of December or the beginning of January.

Mail for these distant points, McPherson, Herschel, Red River, was carried by this patrol. The only other connection with the "outside" world that these points had was by the Hudson Bay Company steamer in July, via the Mackenzie River.

As stated, this patrol had been carried out from Dawson to McPherson, but for the winter of 1910-11 the Commissioner had arranged for the patrol to come from McPherson to Dawson.

On February 27, I received the following instructions from Supt. A. E. Snyder, Commanding RNWMP, Yukon: "Corporal Dempster: You will leave tomorrow morning for a patrol over the Fort McPherson Trail, to locate the whereabouts of Inspector Fitzgerald's party. Indians from McPherson reported him on New Year's Day at Mountain Creek. Fair travelling from Mountain Creek about 20 days from Dawson. I understand that at Hart River divide, no matter what route he took, he would have to cross this divide. I think it would be advisable to make for this point and take up his trail from there. I cannot give you any specific instructions; you will have to be guided by circumstances and your own judgment, bearing in mind that nothing is to stand in your way until you have got in touch with this party."

We followed the usual route taken by the McPherson Patrol, ie. down Yukon to Twelve Mile River, up this to its head, through Seela Pass and on the Blackstone River, down this to a small tributary, Cache Creek, up this creek and over divide into the head of Michelle Creek, down this to a point where we go over a high divide and on to Hart River, crossing this river and up a tributary; Wolf Creek. A few miles below the head of this, crossing over a low divide into Forrest Creek and down this into Little Wind River.

Up to the last divide mentioned, we had an old Indian trail, of early winter, but badly drifted, difficult to follow, also encountered considerable water on glaciers, etc.

From this divide we had no trail--we had, of course, been keeping a sharp look-out for any signs of the Fitzgerald party, old camps or anything, but I had not really expected to pick up any signs until I reached the Wind Rivers.

The Little Wind overflows, freezes, overflows all winter, forming glaciers--good going when frozen, bad when flooding or not frozen strong enough to carry us. This trip we had a lot of both conditions.

About this time the weather varied -40 degrees to -60 degrees.

March 12, when about ten or twelve miles from the Big Wind River, we found the first signs of the Fitzgerald party. This was a trail across a gravel bar, from the ice on one side of this bar to the ice on the other side--about a couple of hundred feet only.

Later the same day (March 12) we made the Big Wind River.

Taking a walk up along the bank, I found an old camp and here discovered empty butter and corned beef tins and a piece of flour sack marked "RNWMP, Fort McPherson". This was the first positive sign we found of the Fitzgerald party.

Morning of March 13, we decided to continue down river, following the trail when possible, and a few miles below the camp we had discovered the previous day, we found another old night camp. These two night camps being so close together we concluded one had been made going out and the other returning, though not necessarily so.

The following day, we found three night camps, all within a few miles of each other; and on March 15, at a point where Big Wind enters Peel River, in a wind-swept canyon, we found about three or four hundred feet of an old trail standing up high, hard packed, and on it, very clearly and distinctly, the tracks of snow-shoes pointing down river. The next day, in a small cabin on Mountain Creek, we found an abandoned toboggan, some dog harness and some bones, which we concluded were those of a dog. They appeared to have been boiled. This was the first positive indication that the Fitzgerald party, for some reason, was returning to McPherson.

From this point on, being a more or less wooded country, the section known as the "Big Portage", we were able to follow their trail fairly well and locate many of their night camps, sometimes finding the skin of a dog, abandoned dog harness and so forth. On March 20, we had crossed the "Big Portage", got down Trail River and were back on the Peel River, and shortly after 6 p.m. had reached "Colin's Cabin".

Having had supper, I noticed some packages hung over a beam, and remarked to Stewart, "I wonder what old Colin has cached up there." Stewart said, "I'll see," and took them down and we found them to contain Fitzgerald's dispatch bag, mail and other dunnage belonging to the party.

Well, we though the party was hard pressed, but this was only about 50 miles from the fort and surely they had made it all right, still, wondered why Fitzgerald had not sent someone to pick it up. There was a lot of money in the packages. Maybe he was going to make another start after resting up for a while. We felt somewhat uneasy.

Next morning, we continued down river and found another camp and dog harnesses left there. Across what is known as Seven Mile Portage, on a little lake on this portage, we found an abandoned tent and stove.

Back on the Peel River again, now following a well defined trail, we found a toboggan in the middle of the river. Examining this, we found that all the "babiche" ground lashing and bridle from the head of the toboggan had been cut off, not chewed off, and, looking around we noticed a small rag tied to a willow on the bank of the river.

We went over to it and through a fringe of willows, into the timber and here we found a camp and two men, dead. They lay side by side with eiderdown robes under and over them. Upon examination, I found one of them to be Constable Kinney, whom I knew. The other later proved to be Constable Taylor. The latter had evidently committed suicide. The top of his head had been blown off and a 30-30 rifle was still grasped in his hand.

At the foot of their bed they had had a fire. The kettle was half full of moose skin, cut up into small pieces, probably part of a moose skin "wrapper"; it had probably been boiled for food, but could not be eaten.

There was nothing we could find here to indicate what had become of the others, Inspector Fitzgerald and Sam Carter.

Needless to say, this discovery was a great shock to us. This point was only about 35 miles from the Fort, and safety.

After completing our examination, we concluded that Kinney and Taylor had become unable to travel any further, that they had killed their last two dogs for food, that Fitzgerald and Carter had gone on in a desperate endeavor to reach the Fort. We felt certain that they had failed to do so, and that somewhere between this point and the Fort we would find them too, dead.

March 22, broke camp and continued our way. Had been travelling about an hour down the Peel River, and were near the right bank at the head of the island about 25 miles from the Fort. We had lost the trail and while searching for it, found a snowshoe buried under the snow. We climbed the bank which was quite high, found old tracks, followed them around a clump of bush and there found the bodies of Inspector Fitzgerald and Sam Carter.

The body of the former lay on the spot where the fire had been, two half blankets wrapped around him. Sam Carter's body lay a short distance away. He had evidently died first, he was lying on his back, hands crossed on his breast and his face covered with a handkerchief.

The bodies of all these men were in a very emaciated condition--flesh much discolored, being a kind of reddish black, and skin peeling off; the feet, especially those of Fitzgerald and Kinney, were swollen to almost twice their natural size.

The last entry in Fitzgerald's diary made on February 5 at a camp on Trail River, and I judged that he had travelled about 40 or 45 miles from there to the point where we had found Kinney and Taylor and it may have taken them six or seven days to cover that distance.

Fitzgerald, in the last two entries in his diary, recorded the weather -52 and -48 degrees Fahrenheit, (that is on February 4 and 5 respectively), with strong S.E. wind.

For his patrol to Dawson, Inspector Fitzgerald engaged Sam Carter as guide. Carter was an ex-member of the Force and had been transferred from Dawson, Y.T., to Herschel some five years previously and had travelled over with the patrol that year, had subsequently taken his discharge from the Force and lived at Herschel Island.

Before leaving Fort McPherson, Fitzgerald knew that he would overtake a party of Indians from the Fort, on Trail River and had planned to engage one of them to guide his party across the "Big Portage". This he did, engaging Esau, whom he paid off after getting to Mountain Creek. Esau returned to join his Indian party.

The Fitzgerald party continued up the Peel, Big Wind, and Little Wind Rivers but were unable to locate Forrest Creek which is the point where, on our regular route, we leave the Little Wind. They spent five days searching for this creek, going up one creek after another, each time finding out that they were wrong. Thinking they had gone too far up the Little Wind, they back tracked some miles and tried other creeks with the same result.

On January 17, Fitzgerald says in his diary, "Carter is completely lost and does not know one river from another. We have been a week looking for a river to take us over the divide. There are dozens of rivers and I am at a loss. I should have not taken Carter's word that he knew the way from Little Wind. We have now only ten pounds of flour, eight pounds of bacon, and some dried fish. My last hope is gone and the only thing I can do is to return, and kill some of our dogs to feed the others and ourselves, unless we can meet some Indians."

They started on their return journey on January 18. Fitzgerald's diary covers 19 days of their return journey and on ten of those 19 days the temperature varied between -45 degrees and -64 degrees though not all in one spell.

I quote a couple of entries from the diary:

"Sunday, Jan. 29th-51 below. Left camp 7.45 a.m. Nooned an hour. Camped at 3.15 p.m. Going heavy. Old trail filled in. All hands feeling sick. Supposed to be from eating dog's liver. 14 miles.

"Tuesday, Jan. 31st-45 below. 62 below in p.m. Left camp at 7.15 a.m. Nooned an hour. Camped at 4.15. Skin peeling off our faces and parts of body and lips all swollen and split. I suppose this is caused by feeding on dog meat. Everybody feeling the cold very much for want of proper food."

On February 3, he mentions, "Men and dogs very thin and weak, cannot travel far. Have still about a hundred miles to go. I think we will make it all right but will have only three or four dogs left."

Officially the Commissioner reported that the tragedy was the result of an inexperienced guide, insufficient provisions and the delay in searching for the lost trail. Actually, the last two reasons were incidental to the first, which was in reality Inspector Fitzgerald's misplaced faith in Carter's knowledge of the route.

RIVER TRAFFIC

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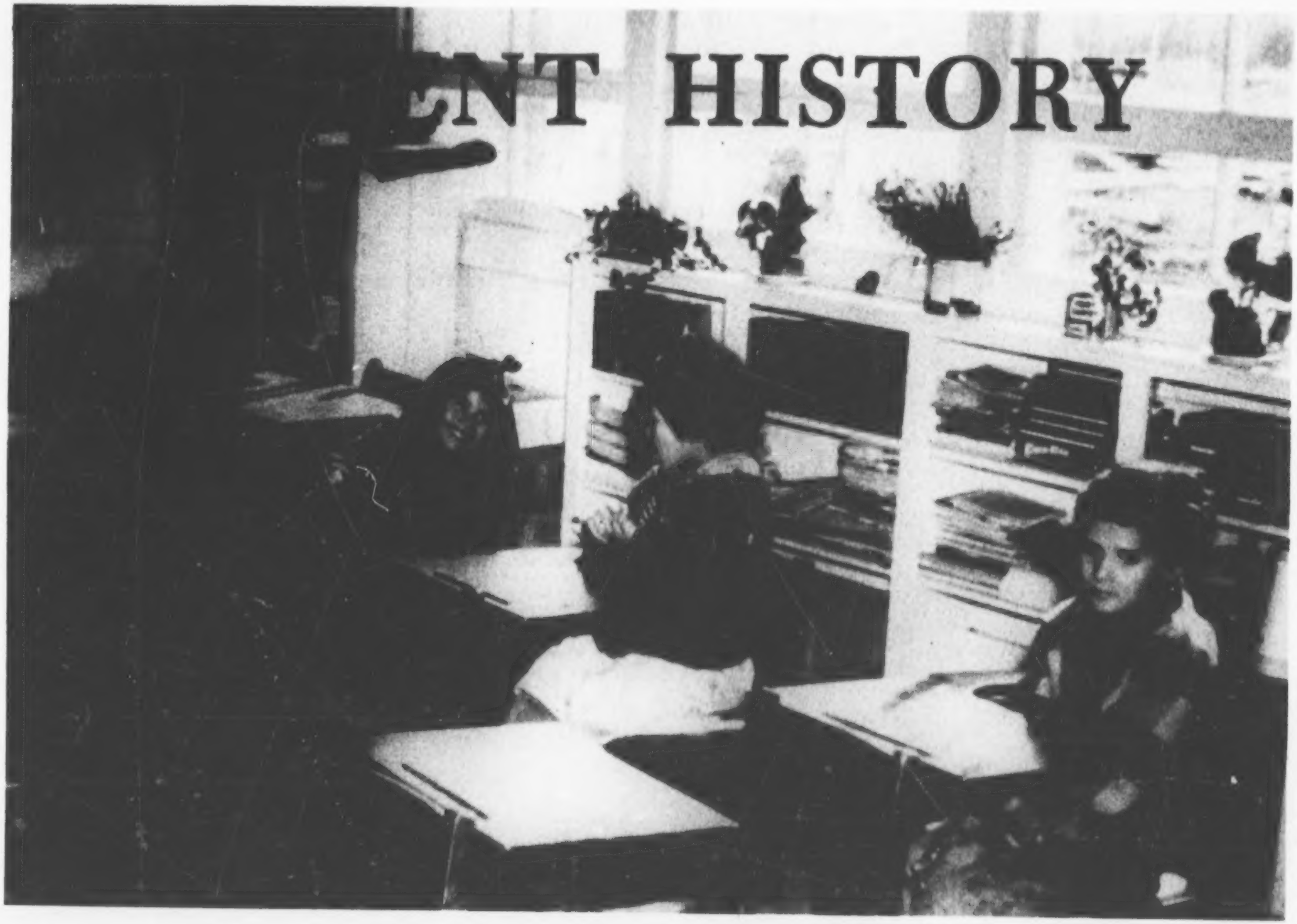
RIVER TRAFFIC

Prior to the establishment of Fort McPherson in 1840, river traffic consisted of birch bark canoes and moose skin boats constructed by the Loucheux. They used the boats to travel to and from various camping grounds, and sometimes for hunting trips. In later years, the Loucheux also built rafts.

The first Hudson's Bay boat entered the waters of the Peel River in 1836. The Bay people used whaling boats for some of their travel. In about 1840, the first York boat carried supplies to the Bay in McPherson. These large, wooden boats drifted downstream with the current, but had to be tracked back upstream by the men walking along the shores. In 1887, York boats were replaced by steamboats, which carried supplies, mail, the Bishop, and children returning home from school in Hay River. Steamboats were used until 1947, when they were in turn replaced by diesel tugs. These tugs are still used today.


ENT HISTORY

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EDUCATION

Before about 1902, when students from around Ft. McPherson began going to school in Hay River, children went to the Anglican mission house in McPherson for lessons. In the beginning, only a few students left the area for schooling, in large part because of transportation difficulties. Archdeacon MacDonald, Bishop Stringer and Archdeacon Whittaker all taught in English and Loucheux at the Anglican mission in Ft. McPherson. Students were taught mostly Bible lessons. Because there was only a very small permanent population in McPherson (mostly Hudson's Bay people, missionaries and R.C.M.P. staff), attendance at the school was sporadic. Parents would sometimes leave their children with relatives remaining in the community so that the children might get a few months' schooling. Occasionally ministers would come out to spring camps and set up a tent to teach the children in the camp.

Shortly after the signing of Treaty 8 in 1900, the federal government began providing some funding for education. For Loucheux children, education was provided at the Anglican mission school in Hay River. At this time, there was a rapid increase in the number of children attending school, though the number of boarding students at the Hay River School did not reach 50 until 1919 and did not go higher than 63 students right up until the school was closed in 1938. Parents had to sign papers giving approval for their children to be away from three to five years to attend school because it was not possible, owing to the great distance and only steamer transportation being available, for them to come home for holidays.

The school in Hay River had Tom Marsh as its first principal. It provided instruction in the basic academic courses with only minimal religious studies. The next principal was Alfred Vale, who served from 1907 to 1927. Only in the latter part of Vale's tenure did the school become more "industrial", with students attending classes for half of the day and working at such practical things as building log houses, gardening, cooking and sewing for the other half of the day. Later this system was dropped and students went back to attending classes from 9 a.m. to 3:30 or 4 p.m. The students ranged in age from as young as three or four to 18 years old. They were kept segregated, boys from girls.

After 1937, students from Fort McPherson went to the Aklavik Anglican mission school which replaced the Hay River school which closed in 1938. Students then stayed in the school hostel over the winter and went home for two months in the summer because the distance was shorter and it was much easier for them to be taken home.

In 1946, a one room school was built in McPherson. This was a day school only; therefore, many parents still sent their children to Aklavik where they could live in the hostel while the parents went out on the land.

In 1967, the present school was built which is called Chief Julius School. Grades K-9 are taught in this school. The new school has a gym, shop and Home Economics facilities. The older school was still used until the extension to the new school was opened in 1976.

Students who wish to continue their education beyond Grade 9 may attend Samuel Hearne Secondary School in Inuvik for academic or vocational training. Some students also attend school in Yellowknife.

Fleming Hall, which was built at the request of Chief Julius, was first opened in 1958. It was in use from 1958 to 1976. In February of 1981, the hostel was torn down. After this there was one boys' and one girls' hostel which were run by Annie Francis until they were closed down in 1985. Students whose parents are out on the land are now boarded with other families in Fort McPherson.

CHIEF JULIUS

Julius Salu was born September 19, 1875. His birthplace is unknown but some believe it was around the Blackstone.

Almost nothing has been written about this man and yet he is remembered as a great chief who always worked for his people. He did not become chief by election but rather by succession which is the traditional way.

On July 7, 1898 Julius Salu married Maggie Vittrekwa. Nothing has been recorded about Maggie except that she was born June 12, 1881. The wedding took place at St. Matthew's church in Fort McPherson and was conducted by the Reverend I. O. Stringer, the missionary in charge.

In the first half of the 1800's, Thomas Tirikoinjikchoo, grandfather of Chief Julius, was chief. He was known as a wise, kind hearted man. He helped stop the wars with the Inuit. He also promoted the Anglican religion by requesting that the people listen to Reverend Kirby, the first Anglican missionary. He was named Red Legging by the Bay people. His Loucheux name was Verisetsiu tyi. When he died, Julius's cousin, Francis, became chief and he served his people for many years. Then about 1900, Francis died and Julius acted as chief for one year, serving the people around the Blackstone. The next year Julius moved to Fort McPherson and that was when he became chief.

From talking with people it is clear that Chief Julius came from a well-known and respected family. He is described as a happy, kind and friendly person--a wise man who treated people fairly. People from other communities respected this man as much as his own people did. Children especially loved Chief Julius for he loved them and spent much time with them. Even in his old age he was playing baseball with the children.

One story tells of his influence with the R.C.M.P. During the time he was chief, the people were having a New Year's Eve dance. It was Saturday night and the dancers were dancing into Sunday morning. The minister and R.C.M.P. came in and told the chief they were going to lock up the dance hall because they were dancing on Sunday. Chief Julius got up, went outside, came back in with an axe and said, "Okay, put that padlock on the door and I'll break it off." The authorities left without saying anything and the dance continued until the wee hours of the morning.

Chief Julius is also described as an unselfish man who gave both his time and possessions to those in need. He used to take his people into the Yukon in moose skin boats and camp with them all winter. Before he left town he would tell everyone to get one load of wood for the old people left behind. Because of the respect and admiration the people had for their chief, they took heed and left a great deal of wood for the old people.

Whenever people were in need or had a problem, they would go to him. He would listen and then help them find a solution. Everyone loved him because he cared for his people.

Chief Julius is also described as a good Christian. Wherever he travelled, even in the bush, he always held services for his people. If a person did wrong, Chief Julius, following the Bible's teachings, would bring the accused and the accuser together and sort out the problem. Whenever a person was sent to court, Chief Julius was there to speak on his behalf.

The chief, being a wise man, realized his people would one day need an education and saw the need for a school. He asked the authorities to build a school in Fort McPherson so that the children could get an education. His wish was granted and a day school was opened. With the passing of time, things were improved and today Fort McPherson has a modern and well-equipped school. Out of gratefulness to this chief, the school was named in his honor.

Julius Salu served his people well and was chief until his death on May 18, 1948. This well-loved and respected man died in a flu epidemic and was laid to rest by his grandson Francis J. Francis on May 20, 1948 at St. Matthew's, Fort McPherson. His wife, Maggie, lived on in Aklavik until her death on January 10, 1965.

THE FLU EPIDEMICS

In 1928, Fort McPherson was hit by a flu epidemic. This occurred at the end of June when everyone was in town, before the fishing season started. A little later in the summer most of the people would have been out of town.

July was a wet, foggy month, which made the tents cold inside. The cold tents, combined with a shortage of food, made the suffering that much worse. Some people caught pneumonia in addition to having the flu.

Everyone was sick except for four or five people. Nearly everyone got sick on the same day, July 9. The first people began to die on July 10.

All the furniture was taken out of the church and all the bedding was taken from the Bay to turn the church into a hospital. Some men were able to go out and try to get some fresh meat. Mr. Owan, the missionary, tried to help as best he could. Peter Alexie went to Aklavik for help, but the people there were sick also. A doctor came from Fort Simpson and Police Corporal Baker and Frank Carmichael came from Aklavik with some medical supplies. Finally, the men came back from the mountains. After hunting day and night, they had caught one caribou. Paul Neiman, a trapper, could cook and he made a huge pot of meat broth for the sick people.

Thirty-five people died in all. There were so many graves to dig and so few people to dig them that one time four coffins had to be put into one grave.

While the people were sick, the river became so high from the rain that many boats and nets were lost because no one was well enough to save them.

In 1948, there was another flu epidemic. However, this epidemic was not quite as bad as the 1928 one. It occurred after Easter and people died both in town and after they went to their ratting camps. Chief Julius died at this time.

THE TREATIES

In 1763, a Royal Proclamation was made which assumed the need for land cession treaties in Canada and established the negotiation procedures that were to be followed for these treaties. Following the Proclamation, the numbered treaties were negotiated.

In 1921, a Dominion treaty party concluded a land cession treaty (Treaty Number 11) with a number of peoples in the Northwest Territories, including the people from Fort McPherson. By this agreement, the indians ceded to the Crown all rights, titles and privileges to their lands. The indians were to retain the right to pursue their vocations, however. For the cession of their lands to the Crown the indians were given: 1) fishing and trapping equipment to the value of $50 for each family; 2) an annuity of $25 for the chief; 3) an annuity of $15 for each "councillor" or "headman"; and 4) an annuity of $5 to every other indian.

In 1923, the Peel River Preserve was established. This was, and still is, a game preserve, on which only natives as defined in the Indian Act may hunt, trap, fish or cut wood.

When Treaty Number 11 was signed the Peel River people believed they might trap and fish anywhere and continued to act under this assumption, without interference, until the autumn of 1946 when they were requested to register their traplines.
In 1956, the government sent out a commission to allot land to the native people in Treaties 8 and 11. They came across many people who were unclear on this issue. The indians believed that since they had the right to fish, hunt and trap on the land, it was still theirs. They did not understand the separation of hunting rights from ownership rights. No land allotments were established following the studies of this commission.

Treaty money became locally known as "Destitute Rations". People recall receiving a few boxes of shells, or fishing nets. Chief John Kaye, who was afraid that the monies were to pay for his people's land, had not wanted to sign the treaty until he was assured by the agent that the "treaty given would last as long as the sun shines, and the river flows. No whiteman shall interfere with this land."

CENTENNIAL CANOE TRIP

As told by Philip Blake

The N.W.T. Centennial Canoe Race was sponsored by the Government of the Northwest Territories as part of the N.W.T. Centennial celebration. The race started at Fort Providence and ended in Inuvik. From the beginning to the end, the trip took approximately 21 days, with 17 of them being travelling days. The other four days were spent in various communities as extra days off. At some points along the way, the distances between settlements were far enough that we couldn't make it in one day. In those cases we camped out and continued the rest of the way the next morning. Some of the communities we stopped at and passed along the way were: Fort Providence, Jean Marie River, Fort Simpson, Fort Wrigley, Fort Norman, Norman Wells, Fort Good Hope, Arctic Red River, Fort McPherson, Aklavik and then across to Inuvik.

At each of the communities where we overnighted there were feasts and dances put up in our honor. We appreciated this, seeing as how we were living on army K-rations. Along with the team from the N.W.T. there was a team from Alberta and also one from the Yukon which participated. The ones from the N.W.T. were from Yellowknife, Fort Providence, Fort Good Hope, Arctic Red River, Aklavik, Inuvik and Fort McPherson.

I'd like to mention the boys of the McPherson team who were Joseph Kaye, John Itsi and Joe Vittrekwa. Joe was known to us paddlers as Grizzly. People from the Delta included: Joe, Woody Elias, Fred Vittrekwa (known as Buffalo) and myself, Philip Blake. Although the weather wasn't exactly what we would have liked, I think we all enjoyed the trip and had a good time along the way.

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CENTENNIAL DOG TEAM PATROL TO DAWSON

(February 16 to March 14, 1970)

As told by William Vittrekwa

Hello everybody, my name is William Vittrekwa. I am 88 years old. A meeting was held in order to plan for this trip to Dawson for a Centennial project. Through the police detachment here, I was chosen as leader because I knew the names of the places and was experienced at travelling these areas.

At that time, I was thinking that the project would make life better for my people. Throughout Canada and the United States people took pictures of me and wrote stories when I visited their cities. Some pictures and stories went into the newspapers. This dog team patrol idea came up when the Queen visited Inuvik. I was the only one they could think of to lead the patrol. I even drew most of the Dempster Highway, naming different parts of the country for the surveyors.

Where I know there is not much water and steep mountains, that is the side the patrol was to go. I knew not to travel in a rush, but take your time, and most of all take care of the dogs. (Note: This patrol actually arrived ahead of schedule). As I gave instructions, the teams followed. One time they thought they were close to Dawson and went on their own way, but they soon found they had been mistaken. I went by way of the Blackstone, but the others went by Hart River; only two dog teams were with me. For two whole days we went through deep snow. I was breaking trail for the dog teams.

That year there was not much snow. This made travelling much easier. Caches were laid out for us along the way. We travelled between 25 - 35 miles a day. That is good travelling.

When Indian people travel out on the land, there is no rushing about, they take their time. When it is very cold and the snow is very deep the dogs are taken care of, especially when their feet get all icy; the dogs gnaw the ice off themselves at each stop.

We finally came to the trail going towards Dawson. Sometimes we camped half the day and sometimes we camped more than a day. When we got some caribou, nobody said anything about law.

While we were travelling on the trail, a plane was sent to check on us. We would mark "OK" in the snow with our snowshoes. We saw the plane about three times on the whole trip. We were travelling through the mountains; they were huge, huge mountains. There were eleven dog teams travelling along, all strung in a line.

I would wake up when it was still dark and then my dogs would start barking. That would wake everybody up. I would make pancakes in a hurry and then wake Keith Billington. It would be dawn when we started again.

The Indian Agent, Bill Anteya, had his own dog team on this trip. Sometimes he would be left behind; we wouldn't see him for a while but finally he would catch up. The rivers through the mountains were very long; some places were like glass; even the dogs were scared.

We came to a place where there was no timber, just willows. There we found another cache, just when we ran out of dog food. There was a big north wind. We travelled along the highway making our own trail. When we stopped to make camp there were cars passing by. I think those people were afraid to stop because we were dressed from head to toe in fur clothing made from caribou skins and our heads were all frosted up. It's no wonder they were scared and did not stop. They never even said hello. One car did stop, it was Captain Snyder, the Minister from Dawson.

People heard that the patrollers were coming along Chappy Lake and were camping. Everyone in Dawson was getting really excited. We really looked like Muskaroo (bush men) to them. Newspaper reporters came to take pictures.

We camped at Government House. Whenever people saw us all dressed in fur, our faces all frosted up, and our dogs all fancied up, they seemed afraid. They never saw people dressed like that before. We camped there three days.

We were scheduled to arrive in Dawson at 2 o'clock. We asked the children and adults to stay out of the way because our dogs might get out of control. There was a car ahead of us leading us to our destination, it had an organ on top of it and also three bells. While we were following the car, the organ played music. I don't know the name of the song; maybe it was a bad song. I don't know.

When we arrived we were very hungry, but they didn't know it. It took a long time to go through the streets. We finally tied our dogs up. The people just swarmed on us like mosquitoes.

We had tea at Captain Snyder's place. The people from McPherson were late in arriving in Dawson, because of bad weather. A meeting was held with Neil Colin giving the opening speech. I was sitting among the crowd; I didn't know they were going to ask me to speak. But as the leader of the patrol, I did speak.

We were billeted out. The people were very kind in Dawson.

After all the speeches and festivities were over we came back by plane. The dog teams and sleds which were still loaded were put into the plane. I had all sorts of medals that were given to me at that time. Many pictures were taken of the events.

Before we left, a dance and feast were held in our honor. This is the end of my story of the Centennial Dog Team Patrol.

Good-bye and may God bless you all.

MODERN C
UNITY

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GOVERNMENT

MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT

Volunteer Fire Department

A Fire Department of one kind or another has existed in the community for a long time. What exists now is a long way from the fire bucket days of the past. The present McPherson Fire Department is a volunteer service to the community. There is a Chief and about 12 local members. The fire marshall comes in from Yellowknife occasionally to ensure that the volunteers are trained in proper fire fighting and prevention techniques. The Fire Department has one fire truck. This service is vital to the community as wood frame buildings can burn very quickly. Fortunately there are not many house fires in McPherson.

Local Education Authority (L.E.A.)

The community takes part in the decision making process concerning education as carried out by the N.W.T. Department of Education. It does this by electing the members of the L.E.A., which is made up of volunteers from the community. The L.E.A. may eventually develop its members' skills so that it is able to carry out the work of a school board.

The L.E.A. was responsible for initiating Loucheux instruction in the school. Loucheux instruction is considered very important by the community. The L.E.A. was able to get the Department of Education to undertake funding of the program.

Loucheux instruction is now a regular part of the curriculum in Chief Julius School. Cultural inclusion money is spent to ensure that local cultural skills such as beading and snowshoe making are taught in the school. Instructors are hired on a short-term basis.

Mary Teya and Agnes Blake, Sr. were instrumental in the setting up of a Loucheux program in the school. They went on a workshop to Fort Rae to observe the cultural inclusion program there. They saw students being taught by adults from the community to make mitts and mukluks which the boys used when they went hunting and trapping. Students also were learning to make sleds and toboggans and how to tan hides. On their return Mary Teya and Agnes Blake Sr. gathered support from the community for a Loucheux program in Chief Julius School.

Band Council

Band councils, in some form, have always been part of the Dene tradition. The band council in Fort McPherson has seven members elected by the people. Chief James Ross is the present head of the council. There are also five councillors and one secretary.

The Department of Indian and Northern Affairs helps fund the administrative costs of setting up and running the band council office. They also provide money for programs, as requested, to benefit the people.

The council is involved in economic development, job creation and other matters that are of concern to the community. The band council is treated as a level of community government by the federal and territorial governments.

In Southern Canada, where indians live on reserves, as provided in their treaties, the band council receives blocks of funding from the Federal Government. The council is totally responsible for distribution of this funding. They have full legal power over the reserve. In the N.W.T., where there are only two reserves, the band council is treated as a form of government, but it actually has no legal powers.

TERRITORIAL GOVERNMENT

Hamlet Council

In 1972, on the initiative of the Territorial Government, a Settlement Council was established in Fort McPherson. There were seven councillors elected and this group chose from within itself a chairman. In 1983, there was a short-lived experiment to combine the Settlement Council and the Band Council. (The Band Council had been in existence for a long time, since the people first began to settle in Fort McPherson.)

On November 1, 1986 Fort McPherson became a hamlet. With this new status came more responsibility and power. such as the power to make its own by-laws. In the first hamlet council elections Piet Van Loon, an artist who has lived in the community for a long time, was elected as mayor. The first hamlet council has seven members: Neil Colin, John Itsi, Richard Martin, Emma Roberts, David Krutko, Richard John Blake and Lawrence Simon.

Department of Public Works

The Department of Public Works was set up in Fort McPherson when public housing became available. It is responsible for the care and maintenance of government equipment and housing services, such as heat. This department maintains all government vehicles and the heating systems in the houses. The primary function of D.P.W. is preventive maintenance. Most of this work takes place in the summer. This preventive maintenance results in very few emergency repairs.

There are two full time people, a maintenance person and a maintenance supervisor, employed by the Department of Public Works in McPherson. If skilled tradesmen, such as electricians, plumbers, mechanics or painters are required, they are brought in from the central office in Inuvik.

Fish and Wildlife Services

The main functions of this department are: fish and wildlife law enforcement, issuing licences, issuing tags for meat and shipping furs for trappers. They also provide assistance and advice to trappers and transportation to and from outpost camps.

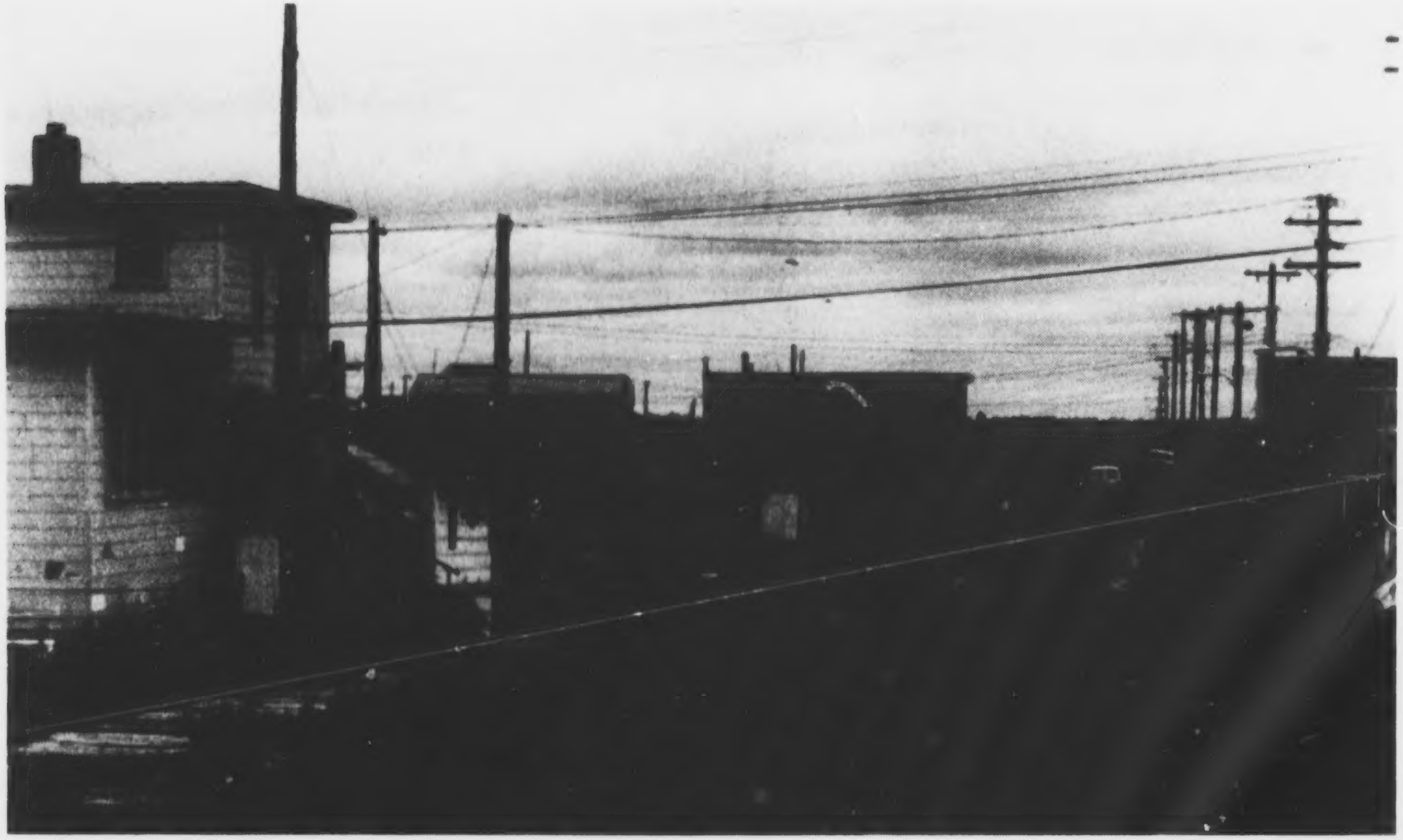
Hostels

The boys' and girls' hostels, which were opened in January of 1979, were closed down in June 1985. Prior to the opening of these two hostels, Fleming Hall, opened in the fall of 1958, provided a place for children to stay and attend school while their parents were in the bush. The hostels also were a place where children could be left if the parents had to leave town for medical reasons. Through an arrangement with the Department of Education, students whose parents are out of town are now boarded with local families.

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

Post Office

Postal services are important to all communities, but they are especially important to the smaller settlements. The four times a week service to this community still brings all the people out to check on any deliveries.



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The Post Mistress (the only employee) is on duty to do more than just hand out the mail. People meet at the Post Office and discuss family news and the Post Mistress helps some of the older residents and the very young with addressing their mail.

Originally, letters were delivered by whale boat or by one of the three steamers that used to service communities along the rivers. Some of the residents still remember these more romantic times and even travelled with the boats.

Ministry of Transport (M.O.T.)

This department began operations in Fort McPherson when the airport was built in the early 1970's. Its main function is the care and maintenance of the runway and other equipment related to the use of the airport. This includes clearing and grading the runway, maintaining the light system, cleaning and maintaining the building, checking the temperature, visibility, and checking the barometer wind speed and direction. Radio communication with scheduled and passing aircraft is also a function of M.O.T.

Today the airport is probably the most important transportation link in McPherson. Food, supplies, mail and people come in and out of this airport. Rapid medical evacuations are now possible with the good 24 hour all weather runway.

BUSINESS

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BUSINESS

The Band Corporation

Since 1982, there has been a Band Corporation in Fort McPherson. Its major function is to handle economic development in the area. The corporation has a seven-member board of directors. Half of these board members are appointed by the Band Council and half are elected. Shares are made available to the public.

The Band Corporation has a contract to maintain part of the Dempster Highway and also owns a service station in town. Profits from this organization are used for community developments as requested by the population of Fort McPherson.

Co-op Store

The first meeting regarding the formation of a Co-op was held in 1968. The store was opened in 1972. The purpose of the store was to try to keep prices in the community down and provide jobs for local people. The store first sold mainly grocery items. It now sells some hardware and other goods that people in Fort McPherson need. Things such as ski-doos can be ordered for members.

The Co-op employs a manager, a manager trainee and two cashier/clerks.

Craft Shop

The Craft Shop opened in McPherson in the 1960's. Women were concerned about the cost of sewing materials and felt that if they organized into a group perhaps they could reduce the cost. The first building was the little house beside the laundry.

The craft shop is run on a voluntary basis. It has a president, vice-president, and a secretary-treasurer. The Craft Shop receives a grant from the Department of Economic Development. At present, women do their sewing in the home and use the Craft Shop as an outlet to sell their products.

Kenn Borek Air

Kenn Borek Air provides scheduled runs to Inuvik, Aklavik and Fort McPherson. It transports mail, freight and passengers. It started operations in 1980 when Northward Airlines went bankrupt. Kenn Borek employs one person on a contract basis.

Hudson's Bay Company

The Hudson's Bay store is the largest store in McPherson. It offers a range of groceries and other goods. It purchases furs from trappers and cashes cheques for people in the community.
The Hudson's Bay usually employs about five people, two of whom are local.

John Simon - Artist

John Simon started his work as an artist in 1965 when he was 35. Most of his paintings are sold locally to teachers or visitors from out of town. John paints what he sees around him; landscape, dog teams, animals, sunsets, sunrises, and hunting and canoeing scenes.

ORGANIZATIONS

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ORGANIZATIONS

Hunters and Trappers Association (H.T.A.)

The original purpose of the H.T.A. was to control land and hunting grounds. However, according to Charlie Snowshoe, people became fed up with attending the H.T.A. meetings because they knew that they have little say over what will happen to their land. There are approximately 100 members but few attend the meetings.

The main function of the H.T.A. is to act as an outlet for the sale and purchase of sleds, traps, snares, nets, harness straps, caribou meat and fish. It also charters planes for caribou searches. (The Band Council pays for half the cost of these charters and the H.T.A. pays for the other half.)

The H.T.A. has a president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer and five board members.

At present, there are only about five or six families living full-time off the land. The other people who belong to the association are only weekend hunters and trappers.

The Metis Association

There are about 40 people in McPherson who are Metis. The association has an office with one employee in McPherson. The association tries to assist local people.

Peel River Alcohol Centre

This organization was started in 1974 by Neil and Elizabeth Colin, who had themselves gone out for treatment of their alcohol problems at Henwood in Edmonton. When they returned to Fort McPherson, they had a difficult time, with little support from others, and they strongly felt the need for such a group. They were encouraged and supported by the nurse, R.C.M.P. and social worker to form a support group for those who had decided to give up drinking alcohol. Later, the settlement and band councils, COPE and other organizations voiced their support for this organization. A.A. counsellors from outside were brought in to teach the people how to conduct their own A.A. meetings.

The building which now houses the Alcohol Centre was an old nursing station not in use at that time. It was rented from the government for one dollar per year to be used as an alcohol centre. Other applications were made for funds and the centre opened its doors. The building consists of a T.V. lounge area, a pool room, a kitchen and several offices. Members are welcome to come here to socialize and share experiences. Some have called it a "second home" because of the supportive atmosphere.

One of the main functions of this group is to educate those who seek help because of the negative effects of alcohol on their lives. Books, tapes, films and video tapes are used. Counselling and support is provided whenever personal problems arise.

There are three full-time employees at the centre--two counsellors and one secretary. The counsellors are also available in the evenings and on weekends for emergencies. Other volunteer counsellors, who have themselves been out for treatment of alcohol problems, are available as well. The Centre is open from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. daily.

THE COMMUNITY

Today it is difficult to make a living off the land. Few people actually do this. McPherson is now based on a wage economy for most people.

The opening of the Dempster Highway had a dramatic effect on all the communities in the Northern Mackenzie Delta. McPherson is the first settlement on the highway north of the Yukon. Access to supplies of every sort is easier now and the cost of bringing these items in by road is cheaper than by air freight. Maintenance of the road generates some employment. As the highway brings more and more traffic, the hotel will do more business. In the future, McPherson may have a small tourist industry based on the presence of the highway.

PHOTOGRAPHS

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Page 67 - Fur press, from photo collection of Don McWatt
Page 70 - John Firth, his wife Catherine and grandchild, photo courtesy NWT Archives
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Page 111 - Main Street, Fort McPherson, photo courtesy Department of Education
Page 115 - Neil Colin, 1983, photo courtesy Department of Culture & Communications

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This Community Study is one of a series sponsored by the Department of Education in order to provide reference materials for teachers using the Northwest Territories Social Studies Program, 1979. Kathy Zozula was responsible for organizing and conducting workshops which involved elders, community representatives and teachers. This resulted in the production of the Baker Lake, Eskimo Point and Coral Harbour studies. The revised Pangnirtung and Fort McPherson studies complete the initial project.

There are also several other community studies and a series of community slide sets by teachers and students available on loan from Regional or Area Resource Centres.

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